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THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE

EDITED BY

JAMES HASTINGS, D.D.

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THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE

EDITED BY THE REV.

JAMES HASTINGS, D.D.

EDITOR OF
'THE EXPOSITORY TIMES,' 'THE DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE'
'THE ENCYCLOPÆDIA OF RELIGION AND ETHICS'
AND OTHER WORKS

ASSISTED BY
REV. E. HASTINGS, M.A.
A. W. HASTINGS, M.A.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST LUKE

VOLUME III

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The aim of THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE is to preserve all that is worth preserving of the modern interpretation of the Bible. It is the thought rather than the expression that is retained, though the expression has not been rejected when it seemed worthy. So much, however, has been done in the way of condensing, re-arranging, re-writing, adding to, and illustrating, that the sources have not as a rule been given. But so far as these are published sermons, they will be found in the Index to Modern Sermons which accompanies each volume. THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE contains also much that is new, written by the Editor and others.

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THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST LUKE

THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

GENERAL REMARKS

1. It is well to approach with open mind even a parable so familiar and so much loved as that of the Prodigal Son. For many centuries the parables were interpreted on principles that now seem to us fantastic, with the result that their meaning was obscured perhaps oftener than it was revealed. The belief that the parables are simple stories meant to shed welcome light on moral and spiritual truth, rather than sacred riddles to be solved, and the attempt to find, without dogmatic or ecclesiastical prejudice, what Jesus meant by these stories, are still so comparatively new, and we are still so apt, in our reading of the parables, to be dominated by allegorical conceptions, that it is well to take no interpretation for granted, however firmly established it may, for the moment, seem to be.

2. Can we find what application Luke intended to be discovered in the parable? Luke is fond of giving us his interpretation of the parables. The parable of 'The Rich Fool' he connects with the teaching of Jesus on the folly of anxiety about material things (xii. 22). In 'The Importunate Widow' he finds the lesson of unceasing, unwearied prayer (xviii. 1). 'The Tax-gatherer and the Pharisee,' he tells us, was aimed at some people who were self-confident because they were sure they were all right and who held all other men cheap (xviii. 9). Part of the difficulty of 'The Unjust Steward' lies in the fact that Luke seems to represent Jesus as Himself giving several different interpretations (xvi. 8–13), one of which Luke singles out (ver. 14). Does the Evangelist, then, give us his reading of the Prodigal?

The first two parables in this chapter, 'The Wandering Sheep' and 'The Lost Drachma,' Luke represents as the apology of Jesus against those who grumbled at His friendly social intercourse with the 'sinners,' as those who did not or could not fulfil all the requirements of the Law were called. Partly because 'The Prodigal Son' is in the same chapter, we are apt to think that the lesson must be the same. But our chapter divisions seem to date only from the beginning of the thirteenth century, and they are certainly not always inspired. Luke begins a new section in ver. 11 with the words which so often introduce disconnected sayings of Jesus: 'And he said' (or 'And Jesus said'); just as he begins the next parable, 'The Unjust Steward,' with 'And he said to his disciples' (xvi. 1). It is easy to see why Luke introduces this parable just where he does; but we need not assume that it was spoken at the same time as the two previous parables, or that it conveys exactly the same lesson.

3. A common interpretation of 'talent' in the parable of 'The Talents' has so passed into the common speech of men that it has, in effect, given us a new word in our language. The same may be said of the word 'prodigal.' In naming the parable, the Church fastened on the young man's extravagance, and so called him the Prodigal or Spendthrift. But reckless expenditure is not a specially New Testament vice, any more than anxious saving is a New Testament virtue. Recognizing that the sting of the young man's offence did not lie in his wastefulness, the world has given the word a new meaning. A prodigal is a weak, if somewhat lovable, character, who falls seriously below the accepted moral standard of his time, and is believed to be making a bad mess of his life.

I

THE YOUNGER BROTHER

1. On the common interpretation of the parable, which connects it closely with the two previous parables, and accepts Luke's intro-

duction as governing the application of the Prodigal Son as well as of the Wandering Sheep and the Lost Drachma, the part played by the younger brother is comparatively unimportant. Jesus would then be discussing the question of the treatment of repentant prodigals, and the point of the story would lie in the contrast between the abundant welcome given by the father and the cold indifference shown by the elder brother. The younger brother is taken as typical of drunkards, thieves and sensualists; of men guilty of those sins against which society has set its face, and which lead to gaol or to social ostracism. The story, thus read, has brought new life and hope to multitudes who have fallen out of the ranks.

Yet this interpretation seems to do much less than justice to the parable as Jesus tells it. We are not going back to the older allegorical method when we assume that, in so perfect a work of art, each of the main features has its contribution to make to the total impression. The young man is, in fact, typical of a far wider class than gaol-birds and drunkards. If we were asked for an analysis of the greatest disruptive force at work in society to-day, could we answer better than just by saying that, in some shape or other, we are all, individuals, classes, nations and races, making the demand made by this younger son: Give me my share of the property?

At this stage the verb is 'give'; the young man has as yet no use for the verb 'receive.' His thought is all of his claims on others, not at all of their claims on him. His favourite pronoun is that of the first person: give *me* my share. Material goods are the height of his ambition, property, goods that may be turned into money and from money into pleasure. There are many questions to be asked, but he does not ask them. What contribution had he made towards amassing the wealth he was about to squander? Did his mere existence, or the fact that he was his father's son, give him 'the right to live' at the expense of other people? Who was to carry on the work of the farm while he was away? If Jesus were with us to-day, could He put His finger more unerringly on the world's sore spot than just in the seven words that express the demand this young man makes on life?

It is sometimes said that the teaching of Jesus centres round the thought of the Kingdom of God. It is easy, however, to exaggerate the place which this metaphor plays in the thought of Jesus. In the two greatest parables, the Prodigal and the Good Samaritan, the picture is taken from quite other spheres of life, and in the Prodigal, the thought of Jesus is characteristically on the Family. The sinner is the man who ignores the claims of the father and the brother.

2. 'Not long afterwards, the younger son packed up and went abroad' (ver. 13). Our Lord does not tell us whither he went; as has been said of the forest of Arden in 'As You Like It,' Shakespeare supplies no hint of the way thither: we must find it for ourselves, or we shall not find it at all. This youth required but two things of his 'far country': it must be far enough away from home, and there must be abundant opportunities for 'seeing life.' For it is clear that his departure was his verdict on the ideals of his home; life, as he conceived it, could not be lived in that atmosphere. The routine of his father's house meant work, discipline, and the Ten Commandments; the life he longed for was gayer and more untrammelled. In particular it is clear that earning one's living by the sweat of one's brow played no part in the scheme of things for him. Work was disagreeable drudgery, to be evaded by all who were lucky enough to have the means of evading it. Jesus again and again drew His lessons from a worker—from a farmer, a fisherman, a pearl-merchant; when He would picture life's failures, He turned to the idlers, to a rich fool or a pleasure-seeking prodigal.

Sometimes, for good as well as for evil, a new way of life requires a new stage. If Abraham would become the Father of the Faithful, he must first leave his country, and his kindred, and his father's house. The Pilgrim Fathers, seeking religious liberty in a far country, gave birth to a great nation. Multitudes, leaving their homes with purer or uglier motives, have sought, and sometimes found, amid alien surroundings, opportunities for a new and richer life. But the far country of the parable is one to reach which needs no travelling. All of us are in the far country in so far as we are rebels in our Father's world, demanding that it shall minister to our wants, our pleasures or our glory, with no return from us, refusing to keep the terms on which alone

we hold our inheritance as sons—terms of work, and duty, and thoughtful regard for others.

As the austere Tennyson gives us no details of the journey of Sir Lancelot with Guinevere when he brought her to be King Arthur's Queen, —a journey which, doubtless, was the beginning of their amour—so our Lord draws a veil over the life of the young man in the foreign land to which he had gone. We must not make too much even of the harlots; we have only the elder brother's word for them. In our Lord's own account, the youth squanders his property with reckless prodigality, but not necessarily on vice. The self-centred life, indifferent to the claims of others, is quite compatible with respectability, with deference to the established code.

In His parables our Lord allows no side-issue to divert Him from His main purpose. He makes no attempt to state the case for the young man, though the subsequent story suggests that he had a case. The sound of music and dancing issuing from that house was sufficiently rare to attract attention and call for explanation; and the elder son told his father, if we can believe him, that no feast, on however moderate a scale, had ever been made in his honour. In some countries, one of the pressing problems is the discovery of devices to make country life more attractive, so that young men and women may be willing to stay on the farm instead of making the earliest possible escape to the far city or the far country. But all this, however interesting or important in itself, is irrelevant to the main issue; and our Lord goes on.

3. In our Lord's interpretation of life, the young man's attitude can have but one result. 'When he had got through all his money, there was a terrible famine in that country, and he began to feel the pinch' (ver. 14). How could anything else than famine arise in a country, if there were in it many like this young man, for whom the world was a pleasure-garden and life one long holiday, and who thought of their fellow-men only as meant to contribute to their support or amusement? Compelled at last to face the facts of life, 'he went and fastened himself on to one of the inhabitants of that country,' and he gave him the job of swineherd on his farm. He was hungry enough to eat the pigs' diet of carob-pods, since no one stretched out to him a helping-hand (ver. 15, 16). (The words do not mean that no one gave him swine's food, but that no one was giving him anything.) Does our Lord read life aright? Is the self-centred life always as unsatisfying as this? The whirl of gaiety in which so-called society lives certainly suggests that it is an opiate for heart hunger; and the widespread dissatisfaction in the wealthiest nations in the world to-day seems to indicate that the mere multiplication and wide dissemination of the means of living and enjoyment are not going to solve what we call our social problem.

4. In too many cases the story ends here; they who have bid defiance to the laws of the world in which they live are content to go on, thinking themselves life's butterflies, in reality life's drudges, seeking perpetually an anodyne for the soul-craving that they hardly understand. But the Prodigal Son is a story with a happy ending.

The young man made an astonishing discovery; he 'came to himself' (ver. 17), awaking as from a bad dream. He had supposed that he was the one sane member of his family, that life was a far bigger, freer, more joyous thing than his strait-laced father and sour-faced brother supposed it to be. After some experience of life according to his own prescription, he felt like one awaking from a nightmare. He had fled from the dignified work of a son on his father's farm: he had to beg for the most loathsome work a Jew could be given to do, on the farm of a stranger and a foreigner; his father and his brother had shown far too much interest in his doings: in the far country, no one took any interest in him, not even in his elementary bodily needs. Hunger and loneliness and shame had burned it into his mind that when he had made the choice he had made it blindfold, seeing neither of the alternatives in their true light; for, whatever course of life we decide to follow, we have to take it with all its consequences. It had seemed the choice lay between a dull routine of work and duty on the one hand, and on the other a vivacious sampling of the best that life has to give, a career of self-expression or self-realization, as we call it to-day. But with the home life went affection, and honour, self-respect and the sense that one was justifying one's existence; the

undisciplined life, 'having a good time,' in the modern phrase, had, as its sequel, famine and the swine-trough. We are living in a moral world: we may disregard its laws, but they will find us out and compel us to reckon with them.

All this the prodigal learned by bitter experience. Is it not part of the work of parents, and teachers, and of the Christian Church to give all young people the opportunity of realizing, by some less painful process, the nature of the choices they are called on to make?

5. Much mischief has been caused in life by the use of abstract terms, most of all, perhaps, in connection with our social and industrial relations. We speak of the 'yellow peril' when we mean hungry Chinamen looking for a spot on which they can settle with some degree of comfort; we say cold-blooded things about 'labour' that we should hardly dare to say of workmen, with wives and families, with inquiring minds and souls to be saved; and it gives us a new conception of 'capital' to drop the word and speak instead of men, not necessarily wealthy men, with some money to invest. In this discourse in which our Lord discusses some of life's deepest mysteries, there is not a word that a child cannot understand; not an abstract noun, not a technical term (for surely 'sinned' cannot be called so). It is a story of the eternal prodigal, of no race or language or age, because he is of all races and languages and ages, who leaves his home and goes abroad, lives in strange ways and finds what a fool he is; and his repentance means that he comes home.

In the youth's first speech to his father (ver. 12) there is no note but that of demand; the speech he now rehearses (ver. 18, 19) is all confession and petition. In both he begins with 'father'; the first 'father' is but a name for one who was to him only a source of supplies; the second utterance of the word is wrung from him by the remembrance of the treasures of love that he had all but flung away; he became a son indeed when he knew that he had no longer the right to use the name. 'I have sinned against heaven' (that is, in the Jewish phraseology of the time, against God), against the very constitution of the world; for the man we call worldly is he who is most completely out of tune with the world.

The test of the sincerity of his repentance is in the last sentence: 'treat me like one of your hired men' (ver. 19). At the beginning of the story his thought was all of his claims: what had life to give him? When he returned, humbled and with eyes opened, there was no more talk of his rights. 'Let me be a member of the home circle on any terms, even on condition of menial service; only let me be within the home.' The work he had scorned as an honour he now begged as a boon; he had learned that service is the law of life.

When more of us have learned this, the world will be a better place to live in. We live in perpetual strife or fear of strife, because we are all fond of airing our grievances and claiming our dues. To take illustrations from only one sphere of life, we do not often hear of workmen returning part of their wages because they know they have not earned it, of merchants lying awake at night wondering whether they are giving a fair equivalent for the profits they take, of professional men blushing as they charge fees whose only justification is the privileged position of those who charge them, of stockholders consulting the economists to know just why they are entitled to make such large demands on the fruit of other men's toil. Would these experiences be quite so rare if the world had laid to heart the story of the Prodigal?

II

THE FATHER AND THE YOUNGER SON

The shepherd went out to look for his wandering sheep, and the woman swept the floor to find her lost drachma. Is it only part of the mechanism of the story that the father did not go out in search of his wayward son; or is there a deep truth there, that man has the perilous gift of free will; that he who leaves the home of his own accord must return of his own accord? Yet the father was waiting and watching for the boy, yearning over the wanderer long before his thoughts had begun to turn to the old home.

This father was of the noble army of runners. There are those who run in their eagerness to do mischief; but there is a running of earnest purpose, like that of the ruler who came to ask Jesus the way of eternal life; and there is the

running of the affection, which cannot wait to walk. All through this part of the story there are signs of eager haste. The father will not let the son finish the speech of penitence he has prepared (if we are right in omitting 'make me as one of thy hired servants' from ver. 21); he rejoices to see the repentant spirit; but who wants to hear apologies, especially from one's child? His first word is 'quick.' 'Quick! Bring out the best robe.' His hospitable orders are short and sharp; the preparations have been completed, the household is feasting, and the musicians and dancers, already at their posts, are adding to the merriment, before the elder son comes in from his work on the farm. Rags, shame, and hunger all forgotten; the petitioner for a hireling's place is welcomed with all the honour, and far more than the affection, given to a prince.

It is a simple story, perhaps drawn from the life, of a father welcoming home a wandering child; but it is more than that. It is the testimony of one who saw the truth of things as no one else has ever seen it, that, behind all that is, there is a great Heart of love and goodness, One who waits with eager longing till His children have learned the spirit of the family, and taken their place as members of the home, asking no question but 'What wilt thou have me to do?' In words whose compelling beauty have moved the hearts of men throughout the ages as hardly any other words have done, our Lord assures us that the whole spiritual force of the universe thrills with joy as each new potential son and daughter abandons the barren, self-centred, loveless life, learns to say 'Father,' and asks to be enrolled as a member of the family of those who do God's will.

We wrong ourselves if we allow this gospel to be restricted to thieves and drunkards; it is Good News for all of us whose aim in life has been to make a series of as good bargains as we could for ourselves, and then have come to realize that God and our neighbour have claims on us, and that we justify our existence only as we live for the Family. There is joy in the presence of God's angels over a single sinner that repents.

As parable, it is perfect; as story, we find in it a curious blank—the absence of all reference to mother or sister. Even if this were a solitary example it would still be noticeable; but it is not. In no parable, nor anywhere else in the teaching of Jesus, is mother love used as an illustration; and Jesus' relations with His mother, so far as recorded in the first three Gospels, are by no means such as one would naturally expect. We have to remember that we have in the Gospels only selections from the teaching of Jesus and from the records of His ministry. The place of Mariolatry in the Roman Church suggests that the early Church may have been wisely guided in its treatment of the traditions about the mother of Jesus. The prominence of sex in the non-Christian religions and, in particular, the prevalence of female counterparts to the male deities may have influenced both Jesus Himself and the traditions of His teaching in the direction of peculiar sensitiveness on this subject. However we explain it, the blank in some measure remains.

III

THE ELDER BROTHER

The son had been reconciled to the father; a more difficult problem remained, to reconcile brother to brother. Influenced by Luke's introduction to the chapter, expositors have assumed that, as the younger brother stands for the outcast, the elder brother represents the Pharisee, and have heaped on him very ugly names. Certainly he is not presented in a lovable light, and it may be that he deserves many of the hard things that have been said about him. Yet if we are to find infinite significance in the father's reception of the prodigal, must we not take seriously the father's assurance to the elder son: 'Child, you are with me all the time, and all that is mine is yours' (ver. 31)? According to the Gospel record, it was not so that Jesus was wont to speak of the Pharisees. We are sometimes told that the elder son is the type of legalistic piety that reckons its services and expects rewards. But there is no suggestion in the story that he had worked with his eye on the clock or expected recognition of his service, until he found his scapegrace brother so handsomely treated for no very obvious reason. To use Paul's distinction, he was a righteous man without being a good or kindly man; a good son but a bad brother. Such men are industrious, and up-

right, but for them religion has no redemptive mission. They believe that the idler and the scamp should be punished, not kissed, decked out and feasted.

1. The limitations of forgiveness, even of the forgiveness of God, are apt to be forgotten unless we contrast the lot of the younger son, as Jesus implicitly contrasts it, with that of the elder. He comes back, and is received with open arms; but he does not begin again where he left off. The wearing of the best robe does not obliterate the fact that he came home in rags, nor does the finger-ring of honour make him or others forget that he was once a swine-herd. Only after a long struggle, if ever, will he regain the esteem and self-esteem that he has lost. But the elder son's inheritance, material and spiritual, is intact.

2. Someone had to ask the meaning of the welcome given to the prodigal: the elder brother was the natural person to ask. He put the question first to one of the servants; the farm-hind had been impressed by the killing of the calf kept for fattening, and attributed the outburst of luxury to the father's joy at seeing his son who had run away from home come home from foreign parts with a whole skin. He put his problem again to his father, and then came the answer. 'We *had to* make merry and be glad. Your brother has lost all else, but he has saved his *life*.' Here surely, as much as anywhere, we vividly realize the contrast between the two ideals of life, as they seemed to Jesus. To accept the Father-will that rules the world, to be a member of the household of love and service, though we creep in shamefaced, famine-stricken, and naked, is life from the dead.

IV

THE FATHER AND THE ELDER SON

Each son was now doing the father's will; yet between the brothers there was a great gulf fixed. The ill-will, so far as the story goes, was all on the side of the elder brother. He felt a natural resentment at the way his brother had behaved; he thought he should be treated as he deserved; he would not call him brother but 'this, thy son.' Is it not a diagnosis of the unrest of our time? Our grievances, we feel sure, are well-founded; we want our superiority to be recognized; we ask for simple justice; and we forget that in the course of justice, none of us would see salvation.

If the strife of sects and classes and nations is ever to be stilled, we must find some motive power strong enough to produce mutual regard and mutual service. We know of none save that which our Lord teaches in this parable. We are all children of one common Father; we must learn to feel towards each other as brothers and as sisters, to stretch out towards each other a forgiving, helping hand; so shall we all be members of the great family of God.

The three parables in this chapter have this in common—they tell us that not only do we need God but that God needs us; they tell us of the hunger in the heart of God when His children will not call Him Father; of the flock that is no flock to the shepherd while there is even one sheep outside the fold; of the one drachma that outweighs the nine so long as it is lost; of the home that is no home while there is one vacant chair.

J. F. McFadyen.

God's Fatherhood

Luke xv. 11.—'A certain man had two sons.'

In the parable of the Prodigal Son there is a much closer connection between the truth taught and the tale told than in most other parables; and the use of the illustration by Jesus shows that He regarded the human affections, and the actions of which they are the motives, as evidences of what God Himself is. The analogy between the earthly father's and the Heavenly Father's actions assumes the affinity of the nature of God and man. The entire teaching of Jesus about God is summed up in the name Father; God is what man at his best would be. We have then the confirmation of the whole revelation of God in and by Christ when from the words of the parable, 'A certain man had two sons,' we draw two truths: (1) God is manlike; (2) God is fatherly.

1. *God is Manlike.*—(1) Herbert Spencer tells us that the ultimate reality is an inscrutable mystery; that religion and science can be re-

conciled only in the recognition of the Unknowable. Matthew Arnold could not discover more than 'a power not ourselves that makes for righteousness.' Even idealism to-day often hesitates about assigning to God personality, as personality is often conceived as necessarily finite, and so unpredicable of the Infinite. And one of the commonest charges against Christian theology is that it is *anthropomorphic* or *anthropopathic*—that it assigns human form, or human passions, to God.

It need hardly be said that Christian faith is not anthropomorphic, as idolatry is; we may in the imaginative language of devotion speak of God as hearing, seeing, speaking; but we do not mean that God has ears, eyes, or mouth; for Jesus has taught us that God is Spirit. Nor is it anthropopathic in the sense that it ascribes to God any animal passions, as pagan mythology did; for He is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all. No human imperfection attaches to God in the Christian conception. But, on the other hand, if we use the term passion in the sense of suffering, in which there is no moral defect, the Christian faith can be said to be anthropopathic. Jesus did, and we may, assign to God emotion and affection, love, and the sorrow or the joy that love brings as it is disappointed or satisfied. It is about the ascription of feeling to God that most difficulty has been felt. The existence of the Universe demands an infinite and eternal Will as its cause; the law and order and progress of that Universe demand that that cause shall be an intelligent cause, that an infinite and eternal Mind shall be allied with an infinite and eternal Will.

There is more doubt and dispute as to whether that Mind and Will may be regarded also as beneficent in view of the evil that is in the world. Even when, in spite of that evil, beneficence is admitted, and affection and emotion are so far conceded as conceivable in God, there is often reluctance in taking the next step—the admission that the Infinite and Eternal Mind and Will is also a Heart that not only wills good to His creatures, but sorrows with them in the evil that they experience. Jesus in this parable and throughout His teaching boldly takes that step. The God He reveals as Father sorrows with man's loss, and rejoices in man's recovery. He is manlike in the full sense of the word man; He thinks, wills, feels, and loves.

He doth give His joy to all;
He becomes an infant small;
He becomes a man of woe;
He doth feel the sorrow too.

Think not thou canst sigh a sigh,
And thy Maker is not by;
Think not thou canst weep a tear,
And thy Maker is not near.

O! He gives to us His joy
That our grief He may destroy;
Till our grief is fled and gone
He doth sit by us and moan.[1]

(2) The philosophical problem of the ascription of personality to God cannot now be discussed, but two reasons for accepting Jesus' view which appeal to the religious consciousness may be given.

In the first place, religion for its reality demands that God shall be conceived personal as man is personal. The mind needs to hold communion not with an impersonal truth, even if we could attach any meaning to such a phrase, but with another Mind that thinks the truth. The heart calls out, not for a spirit of love, whatever that abstraction may be, but for a Heart that can give and receive love.

Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst thou—so wilt thou!
So shall crown thee the topmost, ineffablest, uttermost crown—
And thy love fill infinitude wholly, nor leave up nor down
One spot for the creature to stand in!

. . . . .

As thy Love is discovered almighty, almighty be proved
Thy power, that exists with and for it, of being Beloved!
He who did most, shall bear most; the strongest shall stand the most weak.
'Tis the weakness in strength, that I cry for! my flesh, that I seek
In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it shall be
A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me,

[1] Blake.

Thou shalt love and be loved by, for ever: a
Hand like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee!
See the Christ stand![1]

And again, if Jesus is to be accepted as a revelation of God at all, God must be thought manlike. If God be impersonal, how can the personal reveal Him? Yet the firm foundation of all Christian faith is that God is what Christ showed Him to be, not only in the words of His lips, but in His whole life. Incarnation crowns the religious development of mankind, if God be personal, for in Christ man at last finds the perfect personality that he sought, and so finds God in Him; but if God be not personal, then man's religious consciousness has been deceptive at every stage; and such a conception as Incarnation of the Divine is an illusion. Only if God be manlike can He have become man in Jesus Christ.

2. *God is Fatherly.*—(1) Jesus is not content with ascribing manlikeness to God. He describes Him as Father. What does that term connote? It expresses the relation of God to man as loving him, seeking his good, and, especially in view of man's sinfulness, working for his salvation.

¶ The late Principal Story of Glasgow, writing to a friend beset with difficulties and doubts, directed his attention to the thought of God as a Father rather than a Judge. 'Does not Christ Himself always tell us about a *Father*, not a Judge? Why should you not take His own way of it? "The Father" is the key to God's character, and to all true knowledge of Him; and it is only when we understand that, that we cease to fear, and love becomes possible.

'Perhaps you have gathered hard thoughts of God from some person whom you have believed to be good and religious; but much religion is harsh in its character, and you should try to get rid of any such impression, and to think of Him as He is in Christ. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the *Father*."'[2]

The first and best gift of God's Fatherhood in the teaching of Jesus is His forgiveness of sin. God shows Himself Father most of all in seeking and saving the lost. We must not argue that because God is Father, and man has the likeness of, and is in fellowship with, God, therefore sin is of little significance, and can in no way affect man's relation to God. A Fatherhood of nature is not the revelation of Jesus, but a Fatherhood of grace. This statement must not, however, be misunderstood, as it has been by theologians standing at the opposite extreme of thought. While God's Fatherhood is a Fatherhood of grace, it is a universal Fatherhood; for God's disposition to all is love, and God's purpose for all is salvation. It is only if we put the abstract terms of logic above the concrete realities of life that we can insist, either that man's sonship is as universal as God's Fatherhood, or that God's Fatherhood is limited as man's sonship. God wills to save and bless all men, but all men do not will to be so saved and blessed. 'This great truth, that God's paternal love,' as Channing says, 'extends even to the worthless, is the strength of the good man from the beginning of his conflicts with evil to the end. He despairs of none. He commits all to the love of the Universal Father.'

(2) The truth of God's Fatherhood has been widely challenged on the ground that the existence of evil disproves the reality of the love of God. Jesus knew the whole reality that to some seems to make faith impossible, and what we want is to discover and share the reasons why He believed and taught the Fatherhood. His certainty in face of the reality of evil and sin as He knew and felt it may inspire our confidence that, if we cannot solve the problem, for Him at least it was not insoluble. It was because He concentrated His attention and interest and effort on the moral sin, rather than the physical evil, as many thinkers have done, that He foresaw the solution; for if sin can be conquered, evil can be removed. To Him the problem was first of all, and most of all, man's distrust of and disobedience to God: the core of the problem of evil to Him was that man was lost to God.

He did not affirm the love of God by denying the existence of evil; but the removal of the evil was the realization of the love. Enduring the contradictions of sinners, sharing the shame, sorrow, and suffering of man's sin in His love for man, He not only taught God's Fatherhood, but lived it in His Sonship of trust, love, and obedience. His certainty is contagious, and

[1] Browning, *Saul.*

[2] *Memoir of Robert Herbert Story*, 146.

the Fatherhood which is so real to Him, He, when He casts the spell of His grace over us, makes as real to us.

But this is not all. The Fatherhood was being revealed not only in the realization of His Sonship in Himself, but in the realization of his Saviourhood to others. He was 'the friend of publicans and sinners,' because the Son of Man was indeed seeking and saving the lost. The problem of evil was for Him soluble because He was Himself solving it. Jesus' teaching of God's Fatherhood would not have for us the value that it has, had He not realized the evil and the sin of the world to the uttermost in His own loving heart; it could not amid doubt and question maintain our certainty, had He not in His Saviourhood shown the victory of God's love over sin and evil.[1]

¶ 'One of the most convenient hieroglyphicks of God is a circle; and a circle is endlesse; whom God loves, He loves to the end; and not only to their own end, to their death, but to His end; and His end is that He might love them still.'[2]

Two Pictures

Luke xv. 11.—'A certain man had two sons.'

This is the parable of the Two Sons: not of the two brothers, for that would not directly imply the father; and it is in the relations of these three, and in the unexplained relations of these three, that we are to find our truth.

1. Christ did not often justify Himself. When questioned, He did not often spend time in giving an apology for His actions; but in the three parables of this chapter we have His great vindication of Himself against the Pharisees' cry, 'This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.' We cannot be sure that the Prodigal Son was spoken at the same time as the other two, but even if it was delivered on some other occasion the Evangelist could not have given it a more happy position. The Pharisees, who were righteous in their own sight, and who counted Jesus a righteous man, were astounded, and at last disgusted, to find that the Master deliberately sought the society of those whom they termed the refuse of the land; and they asked Him why it was that He did this, what were His reasons for a course so outrageous to all the religious thought and sentiment of a day when it was held to be incumbent upon the 'righteous' to avoid all contact with the unclean. The people were divided, they held, into those who were religious, and those for whom religion had no message, no meaning, and no hope. Why, then, did He deliberately cross the gulf between them and try to drag the unclean into the respectable society of the religious?

Jesus, in two parables, explains why. Why does the shepherd seek his sheep, and why does the woman seek her coin? And then He turns upon His questioners. He said, 'I will take you at your own estimate of yourselves: I will show you yourselves.' Then He did what an artist sometimes does—He took a great picture and He altered it. In that picture there were three figures, and He took His brush and washed one over, and then painted in another figure, and He said, 'You have questioned Me; you have ventured to say I am wrong; and you have said, with all the emphasis you can, that you are right. Then I will paint you in here that you may see how unlovely your character is, even on your own estimate.' And He painted the Pharisee in between the father of the prodigal and the younger brother. We know that the hand that could paint that picture was guided by a heart full of the flaming indignation of God, but we do not see how flaming was that indignation until we observe that the picture has been altered, and that the Master has taken out His own figure and placed the Pharisee in His own place. The Pharisee questioned His right to be there: 'We have the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and you have no right to open the Kingdom of Heaven to these outsiders,' said they. 'Very well,' said the Master, 'then I will show you what you look like. I tell you they are the lost children of your Father in heaven, and you have the keys of the Kingdom, and it is yours to lead them to the Father. I will show you what you look like in the sight of God and of man.' And we have looked for all these ages, and the verdict of our hearts has always been that, bad as the prodigal may have been, the elder brother, who would have kept him out of the home, was worse.

[1] A. E. Garvie, *The Joy of Finding*, 15.
[2] John Donne.

2. And now we have arrived at the true and original parable of Jesus Christ. The parable as here written is a palimpsest. Sometimes in Egypt a traveller discovers in an old monastery a roll which he picks up and reads, and finds it apparently worthless; but being wise he takes it home, and, treating it with chemicals, to his unspeakable joy discovers that it is a palimpsest. It is a roll on which two books have been written, one above the other—parchment being so scarce at times that they used to write what they had to write upon parchment already used. And when he has strengthened the faint traces of the text beneath he may find the earliest known copy of the Greek Testament, a priceless treasure. This parable is a palimpsest, written over by the Master's own hand, and underneath is the story of the Christ, written in blood. Here is that story in parable form.

A certain man had two sons. The younger of them, warm-hearted, eager, restless, wayward, felt the restraints of home, felt the calling of the great outer world; and at last, so often did he make request, so little did the warnings dissuade him, the father, with many an added warning, let him go. He took him to the next town, started him fairly upon his journey, and then returned. The neighbours noticed that he had grown older in that journey, and the home seemed changed after that. Even they missed the riotous laughter, even they missed the song, even they missed the good-fellowship of the lad who had gone. Inside the home, as the letters came for a little while, brightness shone; but at last, when no letters came, the elder brother who was left noticed that the father went about with a stricken heart. The elder son missed the playmate of his boyhood, missed the brother he loved, and knew the father missed him more. The blinds were often drawn down, and there was never any song; there was no place, no heart, for merriment; and the son knew that disgrace was haunting the father's heart and had smitten the home.

One day, when long months had passed, he said to his father, 'Father, we have never spoken about it, but we understand; he will not come back again. He thinks that he has shut thy heart, and shut the door of home. He will not come back unless I go to fetch him; I will go to-morrow, and I will not come back without him.' 'No,' cried the father, 'thou shalt not go. He has gone, and I cannot lose thee too; and yet—I cannot, no, I cannot live until he come back. Go, go; cost what it may; and come not back without my lad.'

And he went. He tracked his brother from town to town, followed him for many a weary day, and he always followed downwards. From bad to worse, from worse to worst, until it was difficult to trace him; and then he found him in the depths, alone in the mire, starving. He stooped and whispered his message in his ear. He stooped again and told the story he had come to tell, the story he has brought through darkness and cold and danger, and almost death. At last the lad looked up. 'No,' he said, 'it is not for me; no, I cannot go back; I cannot face the old man; leave me to die.' And again he told the story he had come to tell, and it was the elder brother's strong arm that lifted the lad, it was the elder brother's coat that covered him, it was the elder brother's faith that led him over moor and torrent, and it was the elder brother who would not let him go.

My starry wings
I do forsake,
Love's highway of humility to take:
Meekly I fit my stature to your need.
In beggar's part
About your gates I shall not cease to plead—
As man, to speak with man—
Till by such art
I shall achieve My Immemorial Plan,
Pass the low lintel of the human heart.[1]

The old man scarcely ever left his house now. But this day it chanced that he was looking once again, and when he saw them his heart bounded out of the long and deep despair, and he ran—yes, the old man ran, and the elder brother turned aside, for not even he could come between in that hour when the prodigal was clasped to the father's heart for ever.

This is the parable of the Father, the Prodigal and the true Elder Brother, whom we call Jesus Christ.

3. You see, as you look at these two parables side by side, man's great mistake: you see how he thinks wrongly about God. The worst thing that lad ever did was to think, as men have often thought, that he might creep in among the hired servants. Man has thought that

[1] Evelyn Underhill.

God would cease to be a Father, and therefore he could cease to be as a son in God's sight. We have not realized that our state, our present and our future, depend upon the unchangeable heart that never gives in and never gives up. What man has said God is, and what God really is, are sometimes poles asunder.

Then, again, you see what sin is. Here you see it in its awful simplicity, wrecking the home of God. There is joy among the angels of heaven over one sinner that repenteth; there is speechless sorrow and grief, that cannot be expressed in heaven, in the home of God, over the prodigals who do not know they have a Father. Let this picture live for ever in the room in which you dwell the most. Sin does this. We have too often talked only of what sin does to the prodigal; we know that. But the largest effect of sin is there, in the Unseen, in the silence of the everlasting Cross and the heart of the Father.

In the parable there is revealed to us a still greater sin. The nearer you are to the light the more deeply is it possible to sin. You may live in the Father's home, a correct Pharisee, never transgressing a commandment of His. You may live for what you can get; you may live there afraid to disobey; you may live there in the common round of faithful duty, and yet do it all with the heart of a slave. It is pardonable to forget, when you are in the far country, that God is a Father; it is not pardonable when you live at home. And what the Father wants is not the correctness of this man, who can say he never transgressed a commandment, but the loving service of a son who will go beyond the first mile, and never count the second nor the third.

You are to live in this faith then: that your God is your Father, and the end of your being is to satisfy Him. It is that to which you are called.[1]

Our Freedom

Luke xv. 11, 12.—'A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.'

THE true significance of the parable seems to be conveyed by thinking of it not as the parable of the Prodigal Son but rather as the parable of the Divine Fatherhood. For even if the fate of the prodigal be the principal interest of the story, it is but one of three episodes which together seem to constitute its real import. And in each of these episodes it is the attitude of the father that is all-important. Without a murmur, without a remonstrance, as if obeying a necessity which is the universal condition of life, the father yields to the request of the younger son for the division of the inheritance. Again, the father welcomes the returning prodigal before his confused and troubled penitence can express itself in the confession which he has so carefully prepared. And, once more, it is the exquisitely gentle and intelligent tact of the father that recalls the wounded self-esteem of the elder brother to a sense of its churlish folly.

Behind our various attitude towards God, conditioning and redeeming all the varieties of that attitude, lies His invariable and consistent attitude towards us. That attitude reveals itself in *a readiness to trust us with our own independence*. It is the first demand which we naturally make. We instinctively feel the call to shape our own destiny. All the powers of life surge within us seeking their necessary equilibrium in free action.

¶ Dan Crawford, in *Thinking Black*, translates a Bantu rhyme on freedom. 'You must stand with me,' he says, 'and listen to a slave crooning his "logical" rhyme against the very idea of human bondage. Literally there are both rhyme and reason in the words:—

As a bird in the course of its flight,
On some branch will not choose to alight,
For it likes not the tree,
So man's heart doth resemble a bird,
To coerce it would be as absurd,
For the heart must be free.

Surely this doggerel proves that the old phrase, "as free as a bird," is a world-wide metaphor.'[1]

And God grants man freedom. He trusts man with it through that faith in life which only God can have in its fullness. He allows for all the indirections by which man may find his true direction out. That is the picture of God's Fatherhood which our Lord has drawn for us in bold confident touches, a picture so unlike any that we ourselves should have drawn that we have hardly yet realized that it exists in the open page of the Gospels.

[1] F. W. Lewis, *The Master of Life*, 99.

[1] *Thinking Black*, 220.

1. *The Necessity of Freedom.*—Our Lord saw that the chance of spiritual manhood lay in freedom with all its multitudinous possibilities of abuse.

Though God be good and free be Heaven,
No force divine can love compel;
And though the song of sins forgiven
May sound through lowest hell.

The sweet persuasion of His voice,
Respects thy sanctity of will.
He giveth day: thou hast thy choice
To walk in darkness still.[1]

Facing the actual facts of life, the swinishness of the prodigal, the narrow-heartedness of the home-keeping son, Christ could still believe that God had faith in the freedom which made those very facts possible. He could still believe that those facts were somehow an accomplishment of the very process by which God was redeeming men. He could believe that the redeeming life of God was working in the spirits of men through that freedom which they often used only to ignore or resist His redemptive power. We are always looking for the end, and so we despair of the means which do not obviously and immediately accomplish that end. Our Lord knew that the end is hidden and that if we are to trust God at all we must trust the life He has made with all its ordinary conditions as the means by which He is actually working for the eventual accomplishment of His ends.

And is it not the case that our faithlessness has wrought out to its own fatal conclusion? Why is it that the freedom in which God meant us to find ourselves has so often and even so generally become the occasion of our losing ourselves? Is it not largely because, while driven by an instinct which we cannot resist to demand and acquire it, we all the time suspect it both for ourselves and for others? We have actually converted our religion into a systematized repression of individual liberty. We have made it an organized constraint of the soul into automatic obedience to a few fixed and short-sighted rules.

What might have been the result if, instead of radically suspecting freedom and repressing it at every point as the arch-enemy, religion had spoken the word of faith to and in each soul: 'You must stand on your own feet in that individual might which God has granted to you and to no other soul in the whole world. You will find, indeed, that rules are necessary to that strength. But those rules you must intimately discover out of your own needs, and apply to your own needs. General rules there are, rules whose sole worth comes from the fact that they are the generalized result of the experience of thousands of individual souls before you. But those rules will be lifeless, they will be worthless for you save in so far as you individualize and renew them in the mysterious freedom of your own personality. It is in that freedom alone that you can be true to God, that you can learn the secrets of His redemptive power and activity in you. It is in that freedom, too, that you are expressly called by God to renew and perpetuate His redemptive power that it may live a new life in every soul which is to come after you. No man can make atonement unto God for his brother. It costs more than that to redeem his soul. And yet, if you are using that God-given freedom in its full measure and opportunity, you are not only atoning your own soul unto God, but you are helping your brother to atone his.

2. *The Temptation of Freedom.*—Our Lord knew well the temptation of that necessary freedom. 'You taught me language,' says Caliban, 'and my profit on't is, I know how to curse.' Jesus faced the facts, but He faced them with hope even at their blackest. He faced the fact that freedom might mean the escape from its eternal responsibilities and that it might mean, too, the hardening of spirit in meeting those responsibilities, that it might mean our forgetfulness of God and our forgetfulness of man in the very desire to hold fast to God. And in this parable He has set both those temptations before us. There is the danger of losing our souls through the ready confident selfishness which lightly turns its back upon God. It is especially the danger of youth. But there is also the danger of losing them through the sanctimonious selfishness which would make an ally of God, and is disconcerted beyond measure when it finds that He repudiates that alliance. It is the danger of the elder brother.

3. *Abuses of Freedom corrected.*—Yet it is

[1] Whittier.

still through our freedom that God will correct the abuses of our freedom. It is only freedom that can keep the conscience, the sense of our union with and dependence upon the Eternal, alive. It is only freedom that can stir it into life in the midst of its deadness, that can sting the dull stupor of our swinishness back into the old ineradicable desire of the Eternal. That is God's faith in us, the faith that finds its reward and rushes to its victory with the return of every prodigal child to the hopes without which it can no longer live.

¶ The story is told of a poor grass-cutter who found a beautiful stone in the jungle. He had often heard about diamonds, and thought this was one. He took it to the jeweller's shop and showed it with delight to the jeweller. Being a kind and sympathetic man, the jeweller saw that if he were to tell the grass-cutter that his stone was not a diamond, either he would not believe it, or it would be such a shock to him that his whole hope would be brought down to the dust. The jeweller, therefore, laid his plans so that the poor man might find out his mistake for himself. He gave him some work in his shop, and kept him there till he began to be able to distinguish the varieties of diamonds and their prices. Then the jeweller told him to bring along his stone. Up till this time the grass-cutter had kept it carefully hidden away in a box. He now opened it out, and saw with amazement that it was worthless. He turned pale, and came and fell at the feet of his kind master, and said, 'I am very thankful for your goodness and sympathy. You did not destroy my hope, but made such a plan that I now know my mistake without any one's help. Now I want to stay always with such a master, and spend the rest of my life in your service.' This is how God brings back to the way of truth those who have wandered away into error, so that when they learn the truth for themselves they will follow Him, and give Him the service of their whole lives.[1]

And He too believes in the narrow home-staying goodness which hardens itself in the critical hour against the tender judgment of the eternal understanding, which would claim in its blindness the monopoly of the eternal love. Its freedom, too, He respects and, by respecting, redeems to the sense of its true purpose and responsibilities. There is no stormy protest of indignant judgment, only the quiet understanding appeal to a heart that is able to learn its own greatness because in its own narrow way it has been true to right. 'Son, thou art ever with me, and all that is mine is thine. But it was meet to make merry and be glad, for this thy brother was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found.' The brothers who have so variously abused their freedom are atoned by their freedom in the love of God, who sends His rain upon the evil and the good, who makes His sun to shine upon the just and the unjust.

[1] Sadhu Sundar Singh, *Meditations on Various Aspects of the Spiritual Life*, 17.

The Spirit of Revolt

Luke xv. 11-13.—'A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country.'

THE two sons in the parable of the Prodigal represent two different temperaments. The elder son is stolid, steady-going, unimaginative and conventional. He has accepted the lot and conditions into which he was born. He moves in a groove, and finds it easy to conform to traditional ideas of goodness. But the younger son is restless, imaginative, and discontented. His is a questioning and rebellious spirit. He feels that his lot is cast in a narrow sphere, and he wants to break new ground. Traditions and customs and conventions have no sacredness for him. While the elder brother is conservative, the younger represents the spirit of revolt.

That spirit is characteristic of to-day. There is a widespread revolt against authority of every kind. It is not enough to say to the modern man 'thus it is written,' or 'thus it is enacted,' or 'thus did your fathers.' He asks 'Why?' and sometimes the apologist for the conventional is embarrassed to find an answer. We are ourselves witnesses of a revolt all over Europe against ancient forms of government, and the end is not yet. We are spectators of the uprising of the working-classes against the conditions of their life and labour. The future historian will say that one of the most significant features of our time was the revolt of

woman. There is, also, in progress a revolt against the Church, and even, to some extent, against the religion and morality for which the Church stands. Anyone who views the situation without prejudice will see that good and evil mingle in the spirit of revolt. The task before us is to eliminate the evil and to conserve the good.

1. Properly directed, *the spirit of revolt is good.* There ought to be something of the rebel in every Christian. 'I came,' said Jesus, 'not to send peace on the earth, but a sword.'

¶ Our hearts cannot rise superior to the trammels of our life conditions. But we can, at least, be restless. Restlessness is a sign of grace. Not to accept slothfully the restrictions of life is to be true sons of Adam—with a difference. Not to find an Eden in surroundings of mere material comfort and enjoyment is to have one's foot on the lowest rung of the ladder to Paradise. This is the great lesson of Goethe's *Faust*—of the *whole* drama—that a soul may be saved through restlessness. You will remember that Faust found final peace through the abnegation of self. But he had previously tried all earthly roads to happiness. His last work, in his oldest age, was one of benefaction to others. He had then, and only then, attained the simple life. The Prologue in Heaven in that drama shows that, with good instincts, man 'while his desires and aspirations stir, cannot choose but err,' but, nevertheless, if stimulated by dissatisfaction saves his soul at last.[1]

It has often been remarked that progress is very slow. Again and again the hearts of men have beat high with hope, only to be disappointed. The longed-for progress has not been achieved Why is this? It is because there are too few rebels amongst us. Most of us inherit, or acquire as we grow older, strong conservative instincts. We accept the world as we find it, and do not question old theories and maxims and customs and institutions. On the contrary, we rally to their support when they are attacked. If we are asked to justify a course of conduct, we say 'everybody does it.' If we are asked why we do not pursue another line of action, we think it sufficient to reply 'it is never done.' Of course we ought to treat ancient traditions and customs with respect. Only the fool despises the wisdom of the past. But we are here to live and to grow. Tennyson speaks of one good custom corrupting the world. Any student of history would tell us that the Feudal System, for example, was in the providential order. It served a useful and necessary purpose in the development of society. But it has fulfilled its purpose, and if we sought to revive and perpetuate it under modern conditions we would corrupt the world.

Progress has always been achieved by the raising of the standard of rebellion, not merely against the bad, but against the good that ought to be superseded by higher good. Every great prophet has been a rebel. Jesus was a rebel. That was why they crucified Him. He was not, as His enemies said, a rebel against Rome, but against the worship of rites and forms that had lost their meaning, against the dead hand in the things of the soul, against a religion that had lost the spirit of sincerity and humanity. He cried to His countrymen, 'Follow Me on a great spiritual adventure. Let us recapture the spirit of our religion. Let us rebel against the tyranny of the literal and external, and let us revolt against everything in life that hinders the free growth of man's spiritual nature. Let us apply the eternal truth of God to the living needs of living men.' And they crucified Him.

Yes, we must rebel even against the good for the sake of winning the better. The Christian spirit is a spirit of adventure. Even customs and laws and conventions that have been good may stifle the spirit. The Church is always in danger of living on the past, and of stifling the truth by her devotion to the institutions and forms which she has inherited. Again and again the rebel who has been excommunicated by the Church has been her saviour. Thank God for Wycliffe and Savonarola, and Luther and Wesley, and let us pray for grace that we may follow in their train.

2. But there is often *a bad element in the spirit of revolt.* The prodigal was to blame, not because he cherished a spirit of revolt, but because that spirit expressed itself in the wrong way. He was to blame because he rebelled against some things against which he ought not to have rebelled, and because he defined 'more life and fuller' in selfish and sensual terms.

[1] H. B. Garrod.

He did not content himself with rebelling against the restraints of outworn traditions and customs and beliefs. He revolted against the restraints of holy love, and against the restrictions of moral laws that are as unchangeable as the eternal hills. This is not simply the story of a son with an adventurous spirit, but of a son with an unfilial spirit. He goes into the far country, not on a great moral and spiritual adventure, or to extend the range of his father's influence and dominion, but to get away from the restraints of his father and to further his own base and selfish ends.

3. It behoves us to *analyse the spirit of revolt* as it manifests itself in ourselves and in society.

(1) Look at the *social* revolt. The country is seething with unrest. So far as that is a symptom of rebellion against everything in life and labour which degrades men and hampers the growth of the soul, it is all to the good.

¶ In the American novel, *Babbitt*, one gets a strong impression of this hampering and highly mechanized social system. The background of that story, it will be remembered, is the life of a large and prosperous city of rapid growth, where all the mechanical apparatus of civilization is running at high pressure. If you look at that life in detail, if you take the personalities and the actions one by one, you would say that nothing could be less monotonous. It is like a kaleidoscope where all is restless change and shifting scenery, no two moments alike, no person the copy of another. But if you look at it all, not in detail, but in the grand outlines of it, in the totality of what it is, then it strikes you as always the same, not moving to any assignable goal, but endlessly repeating itself, endlessly revolving round the same centre, a completely vicious circle, which, when once you get into, you can never get out of, try as you may. There is poor Babbitt himself, a most pathetic figure. You see him caught in the revolution, vainly struggling from time to time to strike out an independent course, but always falling back into the senseless round from nowhere to nowhere.

But if, in any of us, this revolt is the expression of a desire to escape from the bonds of social obligation; if it is the assertion of selfish rights without the recognition of corresponding duties; if it finds utterance in the cry, 'Give *me* the portion that falleth to me,' and not in the petition which Jesus taught us, 'Give *us* this day our daily bread'—then it is bad.

(2) Multitudes are in revolt against the restraints of what is called the Puritan tradition of *morality*. If that simply means that we are not going to confuse non-essentials with essentials, well and good. But let us take care that in the process we do not relegate to the circumference things which are central. Let us see that we do not light-heartedly cast off restraints and safeguards which experience has proved to be of infinite value to the moral and spiritual life. If we are not watchful, we shall throw away that which is of living and abiding worth along with that which has served its purpose.

(3) There is a widespread revolt against *the Church*. If it is a protest against formalism and traditionalism, and the dying down of the fires of passion, then it is often justifiable, though the criticism would be more helpful if it were followed not by secession but by an effort to permeate the Church with a new spirit. But should not the reasons offered for leaving the Church be regarded often only as excuses? Distaste for Christian worship and fellowship and service may spring from the fact that we are not at home in the Father's house, that we are unfilial, that we rebel against the holy will of God, and that we find the restraints of religion irksome.

The restraints of religion and morality are burdensome to us unless we love God. But if we love Him, 'all things are light to love.' Let us give our hearts to God. That is an old evangelical phrase which we do not hear so often to-day. We speak of surrendering our wills to God, but He asks also for our hearts—our love. 'My son, give me thine heart.' Let us give Him our hearts, and then, though we wander on spiritual adventures in many far countries, we shall always be about our Father's business, and our hearts will always be at home in the Father's house.[1]

Two Prayers

Luke xv. 12, 19.—'Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. . . . Make me as one of thy hired servants.'

LET us take these two petitions, and put them side by side: the demand which a young man

[1] H. M. Hughes, *Faith and Progress*, 103.

made before he went out to play the fool, and the prayer which he offered when he came back, chastened, humbled, and much wiser. There is the story of many a life told in those two sentences; or perhaps it would be better to say that they give us a picture of the view which most of us take of life at the beginning, and the very different view of life which we take further on, when we have been disciplined, especially if we have been disciplined by God.

1. 'Father *give* me.' That is what everyone says at first, and only when a man understands life better does he betake himself to the other prayer—'Father *make* me.'

When we were children we measured the goodness of parents by the number of their gifts. We thought that the main business of our dear earthly father was to get and give, and our one privilege to ask and receive. It hardly occurred to us that that father or mother of ours had a higher purpose, and that though they were always ready to treat us they were still more anxious to train. We could not understand why they should insist so much on that business: the business of school and work and mind-developing and character-shaping. We hated the making and training part of life, and regarded it as a useless and absurd nuisance. Ah! and it takes a long time to grow out of that folly. We all carry a good deal of it into manhood; and we even find a vast number of people who are just as much under its sway at fifty as they were at five.

There are few people who are ready to admit that the main cause of their unhappiness, if unhappy they are, is in themselves, and that if they could be remade there would not be so much need to remake the world outside them. They say it is the world outside that is wrong, that their circumstances are all crooked and adverse, that friends, employers and relatives are hard and unjust, that luck is against them, that worldly goods are not fairly distributed, that they do not get a decent share of the portion that belongs to them. 'Give me *all* that I desire, and ought to have, and I shall be as gloriously happy as a king,' they say.

Jim Bowker, he said, 'If he'd had a fair show,
And the least bit of help in hoeing his row,
He'd have filled the world full of the sound of his name,
An' clim' the top round of the ladder of fame.'
It may have been so;
I dunno;
Then ag'in. . . .

They forget the one thing which is at the root of it all, that the restlessness and gloom and fever of discontent from which they suffer come from their own hard, envious, unloving hearts, from the selfishness that is always weary and the lusts which are always hungry; and that nothing in this world will make them happy until they have got a new set of thoughts and feelings, and their own nature re-made.

It took the disciples of our Lord a long time to be persuaded that their Master could do anything better for them than give them riches and honours and the top places in His kingdom. For three years they did nothing but cry to Him '*Give, give*!' It was three years before they learned to say, 'Make us worthy of Thy service; make us vessels meet for the Master's use.'

When God's wisdom comes into us we begin to discover that the best prayer after all is expressed in that word '*make*,' and that when God blesses most it is not by heaping up things at our feet, but by creating a new world within. If He will only put love and faith and tenderness into our hearts, and kindly and grateful thoughts into our minds, and some strength and self-mastery into our wills, we can have a fair measure of happiness without other things. And so we drop the first self-willed and foolish prayer, 'Give,' and betake ourselves to the second, 'Make.'

2. Now look at the two petitions from another side. In the first we have the very common notion concerning life, that it is all for oneself. In the second we reach the noble and true conception that it is meant for service.

'Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.' The prodigal thinks that his only business in life is to have a good time on the strength of his father's savings. There is a certain impudence in the very language in which he makes the claim that would be somewhat astonishing were we not familiar with the same thing in modern life. He talks as if he had quite as much right to that portion as his father, and rather more, and as if he was being outrageously wronged in being kept out of possession of it so long.

There are many sons who take just that view of their fathers and precisely that view of life to-day. The fathers have been slaves that the sons may luxuriate, waste their time in doing nothing, or doing mischief, and spend their substance in riotous living. And there are many others who, without falling to this depth of revolting idleness and sickly selfishness, still never get away from that primary notion of the prodigal, the notion that one's life is made just for oneself, that the chief end of life is to have a good time and gain as much of pleasure and pleasurable things as one can crowd into the short space of human days, not to do anything for the world, but just to suck as much out of the world as it will possibly yield. Perhaps we all begin with that. It is our first vision of life. The world is made for us and not we for the world. And that is our first petition. Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me that I may do what I like with my own.

But when we come to ourselves and get our eyes opened, when we see the Light of God, we begin to feel that this second prayer is the right and reasonable prayer, and the only one that becomes us. Make me a servant—yes, as a hired servant, if need be. Let me do the drudgery of the lowest place rather than no service at all. No labours of others can free me from the obligation of serving in my place and turn. I am debtor to the world because the world of humanity has done so much for me. I am debtor to God because He sent me into a world prepared for me by millions of previous toilers. God made me for some use. He would not have wasted His time in creating me just for myself. Every day spent by a useless, self-indulgent man with no higher purpose than self is a day got on false pretences, and squandered away in dishonesty.

¶ Every Christian is called to give up his tendency to

> Live for himself and think for himself,
> For himself and none beside,
> Just as if Jesus had never lived,
> And as if He had never died.

¶ Old Bishop Hacket, as quoted by Coleridge, coined a fitting name to be set over against the Greek 'idiotes,' the small-minded individual who lived for his own 'private' advantage, who minded 'Number One,' and cared little for the Whole. He complained of the lack of 'public souls' in his day. 'We want public souls. There is no sin or abuse in the world that affects my soul so much. All men are seeking their own'—which phrase exactly characterizes the original 'idiotai.' One of the revivals we want to-day, as much as Bishop Hacket wanted it is a revival of the Greek sense of patriotic and responsible citizenship, converting the 'idiots' of our land into 'public souls.'[1]

And when we think of our greater obligations—when we take the Christian view of life; when we remember how much we owe to the Saviour who has called us out of darkness into light, when we think of the awful sacrifice by which we were redeemed, and the example which He gave us whose whole life was spent in serving others—then we feel indeed that the prayer which best fits our lips is, 'Help me to serve, make my life a source of comfort, strength, and healing to others, use me! Glorify Thyself in me. Enough if I may fill the lowest place, so that I fill it with true-hearted service.'

A Far Country

Luke xv. 13.—'A far country.'

When we look at the map of the world we see lands and seas stretching away in every direction from where we are, and Jesus, in these two passages, makes a like suggestion about the world of the spirit. To sober, self-respecting people like ourselves He says, There is a country of riot and forgetfulness lying vaguely remote, on which indeed you have never entered; but it exists, and you must take account of it. And there is another country where already I am acknowledged King, a land of homage and unwavering obedience, which also may lie beyond your ken; but it has a place within the world you inhabit; and with it you would do well to make acquaintance. These countries belong to that undefined geography of the imagination, in which it is not leagues of space which are reckoned but movements of the mind.

We must realize the existence and the significance of these dimly outlined countries, to right and left of where we are—a height

[1] R. E. Welsh, *Man to Man*, 232.

above and a depth beneath us. Many as Richter says, 'nestle down so snugly in their warm lark's nest' that they have no reminders of peril, and no desire for any loftier abode. They cannot be ignorant that darker conditions exist. No one can read a newspaper or a popular novel without having tidings of a land of passion and tragedy lying across the borders of their well-ordered life; and reminders also come, not only in church, of the reality of a high country of the saints.

1. When we talk of any country as far away we naturally reckon from where we ourselves are living.

(1) Every one of us is conscious of the existence of regions which are profoundly and absolutely unknown. It is often said that we cannot penetrate the mind of a Hindu or a Chinaman, or guess at what lies behind his smiling assent to what we say; but are we in any better case as regards the thoughts of an inmate of a slum lodging? Ben Jonson speaks of those 'who live like Antipodes to others in the same city.' There are people for which all that we take for granted is continually in question. They are in doubt as to their next meal, and their one clear pleasure is in such excess as would bring disgrace on us. They struggle through the winter hungry and cold; they scarcely know what it is to be frankly welcomed anywhere, and rebuffs and averted faces are part of what they have learned to expect. According to our standards, it is a world upside down.

We cannot hope perfectly to understand such conditions, but in the Word of God the duty is thrust upon us of doing something to relieve them. 'Whoso hath the world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him?' asks John. And Jesus gives the warning, 'I was hungry, and ye gave Me no meat, I was in prison, and ye came not unto Me,' to which in our day He would add as supplement—I was in danger of prison, and ye did not lift a hand to stop Me. We have our work which imperatively must be done; but the Church of Jesus will not be worthy of its name until it becomes a settled point of honour for all its members to have a share in some protective or redemptive service. The country we speak of may seem to lie far off our track, but it is not Christian that we should lazily ignore its existence. Our Lord did not reckon that it was beyond the reach of His care, and we owe it to His Cross that in this we should imitate Him.

¶ I can well believe that when St. Paul went with his fiery cross through the cities of the Greeks, he found men there who cherished a tale of the courtesy of Christ in Jerusalem long ago, and the courtesy and brotherliness of one called Andrew, who had treated aliens as their gossip should, their god-sib, their sponsor in God.

I think we need more of this in Britain. We have much of it, but we want more of it. Courtesy to foreigners, and an eye that is open to the good that lurks in Niggers, Chinks and Dagoes, and all those fugitive tribes—this we want in St Andrew's measure. There are many people as strange to us proud Scots as the Greeks were to St Andrew—Indians, Chinese, Africans, Japanese. I plead with you, who fly St Andrew's blue-and-silver flag with pride, to show his manners towards them, to look on them with his eyes, greedy of the good in them, and with his courtesy and understanding in your dealings with them. There is a prophecy which Rudyard Kipling proclaimed many years ago, of which this is the burden:[1]

> By all ye cry or whisper,
> By all ye leave or do,
> The silent, sullen peoples
> Shall weigh your gods and you!

(2) On the upper side of life, there is another land of which our Lord also spoke, less obtrusive than the first, but not less worthy of consideration, though it often makes this easy life of ours look mean. Jesus does not define it, though in His mind was the thought of a place where men see more clearly and where He could thus find escape from the misunderstanding and contumely of earth, and be acknowledged as King. This country also lies close to us. There are men and women at our side punctually discharging the lowliest tasks, and seeming to many of their neighbours mere harmless drudges; but for God they have an aspect which is glorious.

¶ Some twenty odd years ago I was appointed for a time student-missionary in a Highland

[1] A. Boyd Scott, *The Twelve take Stock of Us*, 11.

town. One day I entered a tiny room where beside a fireplace an old woman sat smoking a tobacco-pipe. Her surroundings betrayed her extreme poverty.

Entering into conversation with her, I found this old woman possessed of a rich spiritual experience, and as I gained her confidence she grew communicative as to some of its forms. Speaking in a mixture of Gaelic and English, she told me the following story :—

'When I was a young girl I passed through a time of great anxiety about my soul. In a dream I saw myself lying at the border of a harvest field. Around me the wheat was cut; in the distance twelve reapers were still at work, and behind them One taller than they all, whose hair fell upon His shoulders like a shower of silver, and who was dressed in a white robe that fell to His feet and rolled there like the lapping of a sea-wave.

'As soon as I saw Him I knew that He was the Saviour, whom my soul yearned for; and my soul, in the form of a little naked child, fled from me and sped across the stubble with the whirr of a partridge, and came to His feet.

'He turned and looked down, and said: "What! thou here, and thou such a little one, and so cold! I'll cover thee:" and with that He took the folds of His robe and flung them around the shivering child.

'I woke from my dream. I have known a good deal of life's sharp distress since then, but I have always known this, that He covers me with the robe of His righteousness.' [1]

There are some to whom the dreams and ambitions and delights which belong to this country are as unintelligible as those of the depths. To them this also is 'the Antipodes,' with things put first in it which they can barely acknowledge, while the substantial interests and prizes of their life are in it resolutely set aside. The citizens of this country are tired as we are; they have a taste for enjoyment as we have; and yet, without a touch of parade, they always seem to take the higher path. They live beside us, but their true life is hid with Christ; it is hidden even from themselves. But one thing can scarcely be hidden always; and the suspicion thrusts itself even on the indifferent that these men, with their quiet suggestion of foreignness, must belong to a very wonderful community, with which it might be well to make acquaintance.

[1] G. A. Johnston Ross, *The Cross*, 11.

2. But now let us change our standpoint. Hitherto we have been making our own position, the position of the common man, the standard, which is supposed to be the characteristically British fashion. In a Continental hotel we are inclined to pronounce every one in the room a foreigner, whereas it is we who there are foreign; it is our manners which are eccentric. And in thinking of the prodigal's far country it may be wholesome to judge of it not with ourselves as centre and starting-point, but with God. And when we thus approach the question, it may appear to some that they are themselves remote from Him.

Both these far countries are actually as close as life can bring them; there is no need of traversing leagues of space or of passing through some curriculum of flagrant and dishonoured living to find oneself detached from God. 'The far country,' says Augustine, 'is forgetfulness of God.' 'It is not by the movement of our feet, or by spaces that can be measured, that we flee from Thee; a lustful heart is that far-off land.' This means that the indulgence of an evil thought, which is the affair of a moment, may bear a man at once away from God. We are removed from Him not by distance, but by feeling.

This is what constitutes the romance and the tragedy of human existence; the far country is so very near, and the tale of Eden is perpetually renewed. There need be nothing violent or dramatic in the evil choice; a decision on some quite trivial matter may suffice. Only if it means setting ease first, and the world's rule instead of Christ's, it may carry a man over the line and mark him out as in the far country, as one who is departing from the Living God.

¶ Think it not strange if that man is driven from God and goodness who yields himself to sin. By a changeless law of moral repulsion he is pushed away. Is it hopeless? Yes, as long as his back is turned toward God. But let him 'come to himself,' let him feel his sin and degradation, let him long for home, for forgiveness, for his father's face, and the law of changeless love takes hold of him. The law of divine attraction draws him then to God and goodness.[1]

[1] M. D. Babcock, *Thoughts for Every-Day Living*, 77.

3. But if the far country be so near, the way of return must also be near. If a man is far from a tree, the tree is also far from the man; that is the common sense of the world of material objects. But if a man is far from God, we must not think that God is far from him. 'Thy omnipotence,' says Augustine, 'is not remote from us even when we are remote from Thee.' Men may be parted from God by a habit of evil and witless choice, but He is not content to leave them thus; He remains within their reach at every moment and is found even of those who were not seeking for Him.[1]

¶ In a fairy story, Sir James Barrie describes how children reached by themselves the island of romance and delight: 'They had been going pretty straight all the time, not so much owing to the guidance of Peter, as because the Island was out looking for them. It is only thus that you may sight these magic shores.'

This is what gives men courage in all redemptive work—that, though His creatures have wandered far, God follows and is near. Jesus Christ is the utterance in time of what is eternally and unchangeably the thought of the Father. Jesus is God's hand held out, to help and welcome and redeem. He never quite believed that men, His brothers, could be satisfied away from God. He was sure that somewhere in them was a restless craving, such as an exile knows who has risen high and has become rich, but who still, when he is alone, remembers with wistful longing the places of his childhood overseas.

¶ One of the saddest letters in all literature is a letter written by our own poet, David Gray. Nothing would satisfy David but he must go to London. He suffered much there and fell into consumption. And this is one of his last letters home: '*Torquay, Jan.* 6, 1861. Dear Parents,—I am coming home—homesick. I cannot stay from home any longer. What's the good of me being so far from home and sick and ill? O God! I wish I were home never to leave it more! Tell everybody that I am coming back—no better: worse, worse. What's about climate, about frost or snow or cold weather, when one's at home? I wish I had never left it. . . . I have no money, and I want to get home, home, home. What shall I do, O God! Father, I shall steal to you again, because I did not use you rightly. . . . Will you forgive me? Do I ask that? . . . I have come through things that would make your heart ache for me—things that I shall never tell to anybody but you, and you shall keep them secret as the grave. Get my own little room ready quick, quick; have it all tidy, and clean, and cosy, against my homecoming. I wish to die there, and nobody shall nurse me except my own dear mother, ever, ever again. O home, home, home!'[1]

That longing is in My brethren also, said Jesus; and He took it as His business to awaken that longing into activity, and then to lead the exiles home.

[1] W. M. Macgregor, *Repentance unto Life*, 49.

The Value of an Empty Purse

Luke xv. 14.—'And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.'

HERE is a short story about a young man who had been having his fling! He had come into a large fortune early in life, which is always a perilous experience. When a young fellow earns his money he usually learns something about the value of money. When he earns his pleasure by hard work first, he knows something about the real meaning of pleasure. But when all this is thrust into his hand by a piece of generosity which he calls 'good fortune' and God oftentimes calls 'misfortune' he is liable to make a mess of it.

This young fellow had also been living abroad, which is another perilous experience. The odds were against him—it would have taken a strong moral nature to have faced that combination of circumstances successfully, and this young fellow had not the necessary stuff in him to do it. He fell down. He wasted his substance in riotous living. He made friends with men who were bad and with women who were worse. He thought he was having the time of his life. But he soon came to the end of his time such as it was—he bumped his way down the cellar stairs until he found himself at the bottom. 'He had spent all and he began to be in want.' He took out his purse and there was nothing in it. And just there 'he came to himself.'

What help did this young man get out of his pocket-book when it was as flat as his own feelings?

[1] G. H. Morrison, *Sun-Rise*, 1.

1. He was compelled to cut out a lot of evil indulgences. He had to stop because his money was gone—he could not pay for any more dissipation. It is an honour to a man when he can walk the streets of the wickedest city on earth with a full purse and turn his back on all the allurements to wrong-doing. If, however, a man has not reached that level of moral development he had better have his supplies cut off for a season.

2. His empty purse compelled him to go to work. The sting of want—it is the only thing that is sharp enough to transform many an idler into a worker! It takes the hard slap of necessity to change the spender into a producer. Heaven be praised for hard work! and for the necessity which makes it for most of us not an elective but a required course! Let every soul offer that same prayer—'Make me the hired servant of my own need and of the common good.' 'Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ,' Paul said once to a young man he had in tow. 'Study to show thyself a workman that need not be ashamed.' It is in that direction that honour lies. It would be a great gain if every young man had to face the world with his coat off; if he were compelled to lay hold on some difficult task with both hands; if he were set to think hard upon some problem until he felt the tug of it on his own brain. It is by that process that muscle and gray matter and character are developed.

¶ This is what Sir J. M. Barrie says about his youth: 'The greatest glory that has ever come to me was to be swallowed up in London, not knowing a soul, with no means of subsistence, and the fun of working till the stars went out.'

¶ Most of us know the word of Edison, the great worker as well as the great inventor of our day, that 'genius may be two per cent. inspiration, but it is ninety-eight per cent. perspiration.' He worked for ten years to invent his storage battery, which would harness the forces of the lightning to the homely tasks of earth; he was always in his laboratory at seven-thirty every morning. He had his lunch sent to him in the shop. He went home to dinner, but he usually came back in the evening to have another try at it in the quiet of the night. He made hundreds of experiments during those years. He built models by the score and then discarded them. But through repeated failure he moved ahead to a splendid success. He invented his storage battery, and the whole world is richer for what he did. And he tells us that his highest joy in life has been found in matching his strength and skill against baffling problems and seeing them finally win out.

Who was it who said, 'My Father worketh even until now, and I work'? His highest conception of God was of a Being who from the first hour when the morning stars sang together, down through the countless ages, had been engaged in a ceaseless, tireless, beneficent putting forth of His energy in work. His highest conception of human life was embodied in the action of a Man who took upon Himself the form of a servant, went about doing good, and kept it up until He could say, 'I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do.' The Master worked voluntarily because He was the Perfect, the Representative Man, the Son of Man. But however it comes, whether from choice or from necessity, from a high resolve or from the promptings of an empty purse, honour that impulse which sends you forth to your own appointed work.

¶ Sir James Cantlie has written a most interesting Introduction to a book which has recently been published on the Conquest of Disease. His theme is work, and the joy which it brings. 'In my youth,' he says, 'times were not so easy as they are now. I knew students going through the University who had barely enough money to buy salt for their kale. It was a desperate struggle for many of them. Some, unable to afford candles, were compelled to study at night by the light that entered the window from the street lamp outside.'

In 1887 Sir James gave up his post of teacher of anatomy at Charing Cross Hospital and went out to Hong-Kong to be the partner of Sir Patrick Manson. There was a terrible outbreak of plague in Hong-Kong in the 'nineties and Cantlie happened then to be in Vladivostock. 'I managed,' he says, 'to get a steamer back, and, after seeing my wife safely into the house, I went down to the plague hospital. It was built of bamboo and palm, and had seventy-five beds.

'"Since you have been here, eleven patients have died," the doctor said.

'In a short time all were dead. Another

twenty-five plague patients were brought in to take their places, and these, too, soon passed away. Again the beds were filled, and it was not long before these twenty-five sufferers followed the other fifty to the grave.'

Then followed a time of unparalleled work, though he passes over it lightly enough in his Introduction. 'When Yersin arrived in Hong-Kong I gave him a microscope and a deal of scientific kit, and my wife used to make the broth for his plague cultures. All of us strove to defeat the common enemy, the plague. Despite the danger, those were happy days, full of work, and as I glance back it strikes me that work is the great thing that matters in life.'[1]

3. The young man's empty purse enabled him to see the difference between false friends and true. While he was rich he was immensely popular. He was 'a good spender,' as the foolish phrase runs, and he found plenty of foolish friends, male and female, to help him spend his money. He was courted and flattered on all sides. He thought that all those people liked him when as a matter of fact they merely liked his money. The moment his money was gone he found that all those false friends were gone too. 'He began to be in want and no man gave to him'—that was the heart-breaking part of it.

It is good for us to meet men not as the paid servants of our pleasure or as tradesmen eager for our patronage, but simply as man to man. No man's life consists of the abundance or of the scarcity of the things he possesses. The only friends worth having are those who take us not for what we own, but for what we are. And those real friends are in no wise affected by the ups or downs in our bank accounts. But when a man's purse is empty he knows 'who's who' without looking in a big red book. He can distinguish instantly between the false friends and the true.

¶ In one of Maarten Maartens' stories he speaks of the social habits in a certain city which had become hopelessly commercialized. If a man was poor they shouted his name at him in harsh tones as if they had been announcing the name of some small station on the railroad. If a man was worth a hundred thousand dollars they addressed him in tones of quiet respect. If he had a million they lowered their voices almost to a whisper and folded their hands in his presence as they did when they were in church. In that city no one knew who his real friends were unless his purse was empty.

There is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother, whose feeling for us is in no wise affected by our possessions. He was equally at home with Zaccheus, the rich man in Jericho, and with the blind beggar in Jerusalem. And He liked to construe His own relationships in terms of personal friendship. 'I have called you friends,' He said one day to a group of eager, active, red-blooded young men, and friends they were, even though their means were small. Many a man never learns what a friend Jesus Christ can be until the hour strikes when all his prosperity vanishes. In that hour, not knowing where else to look, he looks up, and sees a Friend. Rejoice in the day of adversity if it enables you to see the difference between false friends and true.

4. The young man's empty purse gave him a new standard of values. He had been in the habit of purchasing his satisfactions with cash. He had fallen into a way of thinking that there was nothing under Heaven or in Heaven which money would not buy. He said to himself, 'I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.' Then God stripped him of all he had and set him out in the open, a poor, naked, shivering soul with nothing but an empty purse.

In that very hour 'he came to himself.' He saw himself as he was in the clear daylight of reality rather than in the night-light of thoughtless dissipation. He said, 'I have sinned. I have been wasting my substance as a useless spender, now I will become a producer, the hired servant of the common good. I have been throwing away my chance in this far country. I have cut myself off from those relationships which are wholesome and rewarding. Now I will arise and go to my father.' And he went, step by step, a long, tedious journey of moral renewal, but every step in the right direction. He went poor in purse, but rich in high resolve and in a new appreciation of those values which are supreme.

¶ God must send famines, or He would never send some of us home. It takes an

[1] David Masters, *The Conquest of Disease.*

empty heart, ay, and a hungry mouth, to make home-longings. He has to waken up the North wind in autumn to turn the swallow's heart southward, and tell her it is time to be going. It is the snowstorm that takes the deer off the hills and brings them in about the homestead. We can see so much after all is over. Hardship is at times a good teacher, but there is an awful agony ere that comes.[1]

You may, if you choose, allow your empty purse to make you hard and defiant—you fling out your resentment at a world which has dealt you such a sorry hand with no kings and queens in it. You may, if you choose, allow your empty purse to become so heavy with the sense of disappointment which takes the place of bank notes as to send you through life broken and depressed. But, if you choose, you may allow that bit of adversity to furnish you the chance to show yourself every inch a man, honoured and valued for your personal qualities of mind and heart. How fine are the moral results of self-sacrifice and discipline! It is good for everyone to learn how to subordinate his own personal comfort and pleasure to some larger interest.

¶ The Headmaster of Eton was at one time a stern old chap whose name was Keats. One winter morning he met a small boy who was crying. 'What's the matter with you?' the Master called out in his gruff way. 'I'm cold,' the boy whimpered. 'Cold! you must not complain of the cold. This is no girls' school.' It was a harsh reply, but the snivelling boy had a spark of manhood in him which caught fire. He stopped crying, and he never forgot that stern command. Fifteen years later he was riding at the head of his own regiment of Dragoons in India. When the order came to charge on the entrenched Sikhs he gathered up his bridle rein, swung himself into the saddle, and called out to a brother officer who had also studied at Eton, 'Well, as old Keats used to say, "This is no girls' school!" but here goes!' Then he rode on, to his death, as the event proved, but the charge brought victory that day to the English Army. How splendid are the results of discipline, bravely met and nobly borne, in the making of that manhood which is the image of God on earth.[2]

[1] R. W. Barbour, *Thoughts*, 93.
[2] C. R. Brown, *Yale Talks*, 24.

Self-Realization

Luke xv. 17.—'When he came to himself.'

In a few graphic touches Jesus delineates the kind of life the prodigal had been leading. With characteristic delicacy He does not give details. He leaves it for the elder brother to do that. We have the picture of a young man wasting his time and money—and what is worse than that, wasting his life—and, like most young men who think to live that way, finding plenty of both sexes to convoy him. He is self-willed, self-indulgent, riotous. And we are just on the point of calling him contemptible, when suddenly a single phrase arrests us, and opens a lattice into the mind of Christ, and makes us suspend judgment on the prodigal. 'When he came to himself'—when he became himself—then in his years of riot he was not himself. It was not the prodigal who was the real man. The real man was the penitent, not the prodigal. He was never himself until his heart was breaking and the memories of home came welling over him—till he cried, 'I will arise and go to my father, and say unto him, Father, I have sinned.'

¶ Those who have read *Peer Gynt* will remember how the Norwegian poet describes a boastful, romantic youth of his country, who is always putting himself into the part of national heroes, or of any others whose exploits can win him glory. He goes away into the world, and there, too, he plays many parts, and enters into many a new world, with strange powers of adaptation; but he is never himself. Only at the last he comes back to find the woman he had loved, Solveig, now old as he is; and he wonders where he, Peer Gynt, the real man, had been all these years. 'In my heart,' was the answer of Solveig. Where had the son been in the parable? In his father's heart. He had not been in that country. Another being bearing his name, showing his face, living in his body, had been there. But not the man himself.[1]

When we say a man is not himself at all what is that but our instinctive certainty that a man is more than his vices or his failures, and that if you want to know him as he is, you must take him at the level of his best. It was always thus that Jesus judged humanity. He was a

[1] Ibsen, *Peer Gynt*.

magnificent and a consistent optimist. He never made light of sin, never condoned it. To Him it was always terrible and tragic. But then the sinner was not the real man; sin was a bondage, a tyranny, a madness; and it was when the tyranny of sin was broken that a man came to his true self.

1. The prodigal left his home just to find himself. When he went away into the far country, he imagined he was coming to his own. Life was intolerable on that lonely farm. There was no scope there for a young fellow's energy. And why should he be eating out his heart when the thousand voices of the world were calling him? And youth was short, and he must have his day; and he wanted to go and sound life to the deeps. So in the golden morning of desire he went away to the far country. It was impossible to realize himself at home. He would realize himself now, and with a vengeance. He would live to the finest fibre of his being, and come to his own in the whole range of manhood. And then, with the exquisite irony of truth, Christ shows him beggared and broken and despairing, and tells us that only then, when he was dead, did he come to his true self.

It is not along the path of self-willed licence that a man ever reaches his best and deepest self. To be determined at all costs to enjoy is the most tragical of all mistakes. We come to ourselves when we deny ourselves; when life has room for sacrifice and service; when the eyes are lifted to the love of heaven, and the heart is set upon the will of God.

2. A man is not less guilty for his failures because they do not represent his real manhood.

¶ Says Dr G. H. Morrison, 'I have seen children playing with one another, and one would slap the other and say, "I never touched you." And when the other said, "You did, I saw you," the reply was, "It wasn't me, it was my hand." There is not a little in the maturer world of that ungrammatical and infant Jesuitry. It is so easy to make excuses for ourselves, and to say, "We were ill—we were worried—it was not really me." But perhaps in all the circle of bad habits there is no habit more fatally pernicious than the habit of making excuses for ourselves. We should always have excuses for our neighbours. We should never have excuses for ourselves.'

The prodigal made no excuses. He never said, 'Young men must be young men.' He never said, 'My passions are my heritage, and you must make some allowance for warm blood.' What he did say was, 'Father, I have sinned—I have been a selfish and good-for-nothing reprobate'; and it was *then*, when his worst was in his own eyes, that his best was in the eyes of Christ. Spite of His wonderful sympathy and pity, there is a note of intense severity in Christ—'If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off. If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out'—and in every life that is inspired by Christ there must be the echo of that same severity, urging itself not against any brother, but against the wickedness on its own bosom. We never find Jesus making any allowance for the man who makes allowance for himself. Just in proportion as we are stern with self will the Redeemer be merciful with us.

3. Our Lord's great aim when He was on the earth was just this—to make men and women their true selves. They could do nothing without faith in Him, and therefore He was at all pains to quicken that; but away at the back of their dawning faith in Him was His magnificent and matchless faith in them. 'Ye are the light of the world; ye are the salt of the earth'—was there ever such wild exaggeration? All this for a little company of rustics, provincial, unlettered, undistinguished? Ah yes, but under the warmth of such a faith in them these natures were so to grow and so to ripen, that every syllable of that audacity was to prove itself literally true.

¶ The boys at Rugby used to say of Dr Arnold, 'It would be mean to tell him a lie, he trusts us so.' All that was best in them began to germinate under the influence of Dr Arnold's faith. And if it was so under the trust of Arnold, what must have been the influence of Christ, when a man felt that he was trusted by those eyes that saw into the depths. Christ aimed at more than making people better; His aim and object was to make them *themselves*. He saw from the first hour all that was hidden in Simon and Matthew, Lazarus and Mary. And then He lived with them, and showed what He expected, and hoped undauntedly and never

wearied, until at last, just like the prodigal, they came to their true selves. It took far more than their faith in Christ to do that. It took the superb faith of Christ in them.

4. That is the reason why the follower of Christ is the possessor of the largest freedom. The nearer a man is to being himself, the nearer is he to sweet liberty. We go into certain companies, for instance, and we speedily feel that we are not at home there. What is the word we use to express that? We say we are constrained—that is, imprisoned. But by our own fireside, and among those who love us, we are not constrained, we have a perfect liberty; and at the basis of that social liberty there lies the fact that there we are ourselves.

It is the same in the deeper world of morals. When we are ourselves, then are we free. It is *not* freedom to do just as we please in defiance of all the laws that girdle us. Freedom is power to realize ourselves; to move unfalteringly towards the vision; and the paradox of Christianity is this, that that comes through obedience to Christ.

Think of the schoolgirl practising her music. Is not that the weariest of bondage? Is this the happy face we saw so lately, flushed with the eager merriment of play? But, set down the musical genius at the instrument, and get him to interpret some great master, and the thoughts which he utters are the master's thoughts, and yet he is magnificently free. The child is in bondage, the genius is at liberty. The child is unnatural, the genius is himself. The child is slaving under an outward law, the genius has the spirit of the master. And 'if any man have not the spirit of Christ, then,' says the Scripture, 'he is none of His.'

¶ August Strindberg, the Swedish poet and dramatist, who died at Stockholm a few years ago, throughout the greater part of his life was the pride and inspiration of anti-Christian radicalism on the Continent; but he came back eventually to the old moorings. His very last work, in which he reviews his chequered sixty years' pilgrimage, has been aptly described as 'the canticle of his life, a hymn of thankfulness for the recovered faith in which he has found peace.' 'Only in life with God,' he says, 'is there freedom of thought, freedom from impure impulses, selfish and ambitious interests. That is the *freed* thinker in contrast to the "free-thinker," who has left the rails and lost connection with the overhead wire.' [1]

Deep Calling unto Deep

Luke xv. 17.—'When he came to himself.'

THERE can be no doubt that men for the most part have come to God through a certain distress and sorrow of the soul, by the way of defeat. For a man has 'come to himself,' in the deep sense of the words, when he has come to the end of himself—when his own natural strength and resources have been consumed and, though he must still live, he has nothing. 'There is first that which is natural,' says the Apostle, 'and *afterwards*, that which is spiritual.'

We read in Genesis that God made man 'out of the dust.' And it is out of the dust—perhaps it is only out of the dust—that He still makes men. Out of the dust, out of our broken and crushed faculties, out of our wasted capacities and lost opportunities; out of the ruins, out of what is left by the earthquake or by the wear of time—God still makes men. We are not quite in the hands of God until in some matter, which is so deep that it involves our very life, we are in the dust before God.

¶ What a new peace comes into the heart when we just let go! Mr Galsworthy, in one of his short stories, tells of two men who met together and compared notes of their experiences. One was blind; but he describes how it had brought him a kind of peace. It was the last misfortune. 'It gives you a feelin' of bein' insured like.' The other had been in prison, and respectable society had made him an outcast. But he, also, had found, even in that experience a kind of peace. He was no longer under the tyranny of its conventions and need no longer be the slave of the bubble reputation. His face had the smile of a man who has found a new security. The blind man asked leave to pass his fingers over it. 'Yes,' he said, as he felt the lines of its confidence, 'same with you—touched bottom.' There is always a peace in being set free from fears and false standards, whatever does it. There is a relief in letting go. But only the man who has seen Jesus and finds his pride so shattered that

[1] H. L. Simpson, *The Intention of His Soul.*

he has nothing else to trust to but Christ finds the real rock which is the foundation that cannot be moved.

It is true that in our Lord's great parable there was a son who stayed at home. And in the household of human souls there are those who have never wandered, who have never needed to pass through the experience of despair on their way to faith. 'Souls are of two kinds: the once-born, and the twice-born.' In the case of the former, Christ encountered them just where they were, and they looked up and went on again almost in the old way—only with a new happiness, and a deeper understanding.

¶ Bunyan and Augustine and Paul represent a multitude who undergo a sudden and dramatic conversion; and such vivid transitions are still common and called for. But their revolutionary experience must not dominate us. It is by no means always a convulsive or spasmodic ordeal. There is no fixed regulation process binding upon every candidate for the kingdom of heaven. In some it is explosive; in others, as in the case of Harriet Beecher Stowe, it is an unfolding of the soul like a flower to the sun. The Spirit falls on some as fire, on others as a dove: it was like a dove that He descended on the young Christ.

But, though that is so, nevertheless it is true that in all the ages those who have said the best things for Christ, those who have felt most directly His Power and Godhead, are those who have looked to Him out of their own painful and embarrassed souls. In their hearts, at the core and centre of their being, some personal thing lay like a load and gnawed like a sore, until one day it became quite intolerable, and in that day they gathered all their strength into one great cry unto the Lord, and from that moment the darkness was passed.

1. This hour of fundamental despair, in which we find ourselves out, comes to us all in various ways; and for each one of us it is a decisive hour. It is one of those hours in which what we do with ourselves, whatever it be, leaves a mark for ever. It is our hour of greatest opportunity and peril. Of opportunity, for we may embrace Christ with a joy and reality such that we shall never break away. Of peril, for in that great hour we may hang back, we may refuse to deal with our soul on the level of its own tremendous seriousness; or for fear of the cost may turn away, leaving what was an open door in front of us slowly to close.

All Christian preaching rests upon the conviction that beneath the surface of every life, and especially of every life that has had any dealings with the Bible view of things, some crisis is slowly gathering, some dissatisfaction is steadily mounting to a head, some hunger for God, for moral deliverance, for a clean heart, for a new life, is coming to the point of crying out; that there is something going on in every heart of such a kind that if people would only let it have its way it would lead them right up to Jesus Christ. 'The law was my schoolmaster to bring me to Christ.' So said the great Apostle. So say we all. The Law—God's Holy Will—its demands, its rebukes, and our own misery as we sit down in the midst of our failures—the Law is God's Hand leading us to Christ.

2. It is because Christ can take part with us in those deep hours when we see ourselves truly and when it is a matter of life and death how we shall deal with ourselves—it is because Christ can take part with us in these profoundly personal matters that our acknowledgment of Him is something which we reserve for no other Being. The true knowledge of Christ is of Him as our Saviour—who stands between us and our overwhelming sense of shame, who lifts us out of the dust. People may admire Christ, they may have a human affection for Him, they may have an enthusiasm for His ideals—and that is all good and well. But so far they do not know Christ as He is able to be known, for Christ is God by the testimony of those who have gone to Him in dust and tears, and returning from His holy and searching Presence have resumed life in the Power of God.

3. More than once did Christ assure us that we would never, could never, come into perfect communion with Him unless in consequence of some great stress, something which had the effect of setting us apart and making our hearts very tender; that we should never know Him until we showed Him our wounds and He showed us His. One illustration which He used was of the Vine and the Branches. As there is no grafting without wounds, so we unite ourselves to Christ and He to us just at

the place where life has wounded us, where something has come to us which we cannot bear alone. Some great sorrow of the soul, it may be. But some great joy it may also be. For great joy even more than great sorrow may wound—that is to say, may lay open the soul. But in any case, it is just there—at the very point where the wound is—that we are to begin our private spiritual dealings with the Saviour of the world.

At such an hour when our soul is wounded—wounded with grief, or wounded as it may well be with happiness, with the vision of God—we are to come to Him as unto God, and press our wounded soul to that loving and understanding soul of His, which likewise was wounded—wounded just because He loved us and because we were what we were.[1]

I was a stricken deer that left the herd
Long since; with many an arrow deep infixed
My panting side was charged, when I withdrew
To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.
There was I found by One who had Himself
Been hurt by the archers.

Coming to One's Self

Luke xv. 17.—'When he came to himself.'

The story of the prodigal never grows old, for the sad facts on which it is based are only too familiar to successive generations. The anguish of the father's heart, the folly and repentance of the younger son, the self-righteousness and censoriousness of the elder brother—these or similar experiences represent the tragic secrets of many a family circle at the present day.

The central figure, as in Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Balzac's *Père Goriot*, is the patient, suffering father. But instead of expounding the parable as a whole let us confine our attention to the striking phrase which our Lord used to describe the crisis in the prodigal's career—'He came to himself.'

The same form of words is used to describe the return to consciousness of any one who has been for a time insensible. At the first sign or glimmer of intelligence displayed by a person who has been under the influence of an anæsthetic, or in a faint, or submerged in water, we say 'he is coming round,' or 'coming to,' or 'coming to himself.' The arrest that has been laid on his faculties is observed to be passing off. What is going on is apparently being taken in, to some extent, by the hitherto unresponsive subject; and when the process of recognition has reached the stage of completeness, we declare that 'he has come to himself again.'

Now, the experience of recovery, represented by this usage of the phrase, has no moral quality whatever belonging to it. It is simply a reawakening of the mental powers, and a re-exercising on a human being's part of the intelligent functions that were in action before the state of stupor supervened. In the case of a combatant, for example, who has been struck senseless by an opponent, a gleam of hatred against his foe appearing in the fallen man's eyes might be hailed by his comrades as a sign that he was 'coming to himself.'

But the phrase in question is descriptive of another kind of experience. It signifies a complete change in a person's attitude towards life. We have all heard people explaining how, as the result of things which they said or did, they succeeded 'in bringing a certain individual to his senses.' The man they were referring to had perhaps been behaving foolishly, or selfishly, or brutally before they ventured to interfere. But when at last they felt obliged to do so, the effect of their intervention seemed to them to be satisfactory. The offender came to his senses. What occurred was not that a mind emerged from a state of inactivity and insensibility, but that a conscience was awakened as out of a deep sleep. In other words, an experience essentially moral in its nature happened in the life of a particular person. And it is to such an experience that the statement made in our text points. The prodigal in the parable 'came to his senses,' or, as it is more suggestively put, 'came to himself.'

When the prodigal got his patrimony into his hands and started out for the far country, his idea was that he was going to see life and be a man. Impatient of his father's supervision and control, he was determined to be his own master. The vision cast its spell attractively over him, and after it he went with impetuous haste. Persuaded that the self, with its capacity for sensual indulgences, represented

[1] J. A. Hutton, *Our Only Safeguard*, 188.

what was most distinctive of manhood, he plunged headlong into a career of sin. Fortunately his substance was not unlimited. In course of time he found that he had wasted it all, for riotous living has never been anything else than a costly business. Fortunately, too, he fell in with no foolish, if well-intentioned, philanthropist, who might have shielded him from the consequences of his wrong-doing, and encouraged him to believe that he had sinned less than he had been sinned against. The only person, according to the story, with whom he had any dealings, was a citizen who sent him into his fields to feed swine. There and then he 'came to himself.'

There was no mistaking his true self when he came to it. Forlorn though it was, he knew it at once. The meeting had been long delayed, but the recognition was immediate. In every human being there is a potentiality of goodness and purity, a capacity of serving the highest. In the development of that ideal self, in the realization of that potentiality and the fulfilment of that capacity, our real personality finds expression. Never believe that the self which betrays all that is most sacred in your memories of the past and all that is noblest in your dreams of the future is your true self. Stand over it, and with shame and indignation repudiate it. Claim to be identified with the self that you ought to be, and fight the good fight to become such.

There are certain facts in connection with the prodigal's experience which we ought not to overlook. Emphasis is given to them in the story.

1. Notice, for example, that when he came to himself, he was *profoundly dissatisfied with his lot.* 'How many hired servants of my father's,' he said, 'have bread enough and to spare, and I perish here with hunger.' The fact that the wanderer would be certain to get plenty to eat at home could not be called a lofty motive for his returning. Things happen that way, however, in real life. But it should be borne in mind that the story is a parable. The prodigal's comparison of his actual condition of starvation with the comfortable lot enjoyed by his father's servants is intended to represent a conscience awakened to the knowledge of what is, and of what might be. The disproportion is perceived. The revelation to a man of what he is, is always accompanied by the revelation of what he might be, and is not. The gospel of Christ aims at producing this schism in experience, with its attendant distress of mind. But it also comes to us with the assurance that what we are we need not remain, and that what we might be we can more than become, through Him that loved us.

2. Again, we are told that when he came to himself, he *acknowledged his guilt.* 'I will say,' he vowed, 'I have sinned.' We can imagine his having assumed a different attitude. He might conceivably have tried to shift the blame of his wild career on to other shoulders. 'If his father,' he might have argued, 'had not been so strict with him in the old days, or if his brother had not been so self-satisfied and cold and unapproachable, he would never have left home.' Nor did he break out into invectives against the citizen whose swine he was herding, and violently attack the economic system of the country in which he was suffering dreadful hardships. Why? Because 'he had come to himself.' And his having done so included the consciousness, as it always does in such cases, that he was guilty. Divest himself of responsibility he dared not. It would not have been his 'true self,' that he had 'come to,' if he had begun forthwith to attribute the blame of his condition to others. It would have been as 'false' a self, as that which had made his lusts his master. 'I have sinned:—the man who is not brave enough to say that, who shirks responsibility for what he has done, may not be a prodigal in the usual acceptation of that term, but his moral nature is none the less corrupt. He is in grave danger of never being able 'to come to himself.'

3. Finally, the prodigal *went to his father.* 'I will arise,' he said, 'and go to my father.' And forthwith he proceeded to act on the resolve he had made.

Lord, I would rise, and run to Thee,—
Christ of God, who didst die for me;
But my feet are bound with the chains of sin,
And my heart is ashes and dust within.

Lord, I would rise, and run to Thee
If Thou'dst open mine eyes and let me see
How beautiful shines Thy deathless love
In Thy face that is bending my face above![1]

[1] L. Maclean Watt.

The words re-state the old truth that we are incomplete without the fellowship of God. When we 'come to our true selves' we discover that fact. A need and a longing are awakened in us. And this parable assures us of the yearning love in the heart of the Divine Father towards His erring children.

'This is a wonderful reading of God's heart,' says Mr Gossip in his book *From the Edge of the Crowd*, 'and oh, the splendour of the fact that it is true. We sin, and God's answer is love; we heap up more sin, and He gives more love; we make our sin an inexcusable thing, and His answer is Calvary.' So wherever we may have turned our prodigal steps, and even when we are yet a great way off—urged forward by no very insistent impulse, held back by many a doubt and the consciousness of our unworthiness—He sees us, and comes out to welcome us.

Then in communion with Him, and in the service of His Will, we enter upon that life which is life indeed and which gives expression and satisfaction to all that is deepest and best in our natures, and in which is wrapped up the very promise of immortality.[1]

The Home-sickness of the Soul

Luke xv. 17.—'And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!'

Does that lamp still burn in my Father's house,
  Which he kindled the night I went away?
I turned once beneath the cedar boughs,
  And marked it gleam with a golden ray;
  Did he think to light me home some day?

Hungry here with the crunching swine,
  Hungry harvest have I to reap;
In a dream I count my Father's kine,
  I hear the tinkling bells of his sheep,
  I watch his lambs that browse and leap.

There is plenty of bread at home,
  His servants have bread enough and to spare;
The purple wine-fat froths with foam,
  Oil and spices make sweet the air,
  While I perish hungry and bare.

Rich and blessed those servants, rather
  Than I who see not my Father's face!
I will arise and go to my Father:—
  'Fallen from sonship, beggared of grace,
  Grant me, Father, a servant's place.'

1. *The Unrest of Sin.*—(1) The prodigal was an exile; he was in a far country. It was the memory of his home that filled his heart. There are conceptions of the awakened sinner that make him the prey of an angry and threatening conscience. Sometimes when a man comes to himself he can see nothing and hear nothing in the universe but the terrors and judgments of a sovereign God. But it was not terror that smote the prodigal deep. It was home for which his poor soul was crying. He saw the farm, bosomed among the hills, and the weary oxen coming home at eventide, and the happy circle gathered round the fire, and his father crying to heaven for the wanderer. His sorrow's crown of sorrows was remembering happier things. He came to himself, and he was home-sick.

Jesus would have us learn from that that wickedness is not the home-land of the soul, and that all the unrest and the dissatisfaction of the wicked are just the craving of his heart for home. We were not fashioned to be at home in sin. We bear the image of God, and God is goodness. The native air of this mysterious heart is the love and purity and joy of heaven. So when a man deliberately sins, and all the time hungers for better things, it is not the hunger for an impossible ideal; it is the hunger of his soul for home.

¶ In that very fascinating little volume by Charlotte Yonge in which she narrates the history of the Moors in Spain, there are few pages more enthralling than those in which she tells the story of Abderraman. Abderraman was the first Moorish Khalif in Spain. He was an eastern, bred by the Euphrates. There was no great beauty in the scenes where he spent his childhood. And his Spanish home, in the old city of Cordova, seems to have been a fairy-palace of delight. Yet among all the groves and towers and fountains of fair Cordova, Abderraman was miserable—it was banishment. And when he got a palm-tree from his Syrian home, and planted it in his Spanish garden, one of the old ballads of the Arabs tell us, he could never look at it without tears.

[1] A. B. Macaulay, *The Word of the Cross*, 257.

We shall never understand the soul's unrest, amid the exquisite delights of sense and sin, unless it is hungering for another country as Abderraman hungered for his Syrian dwelling. We were made in goodness, and we were made for goodness; and the native air of the soul is love and truth; and we shall always be dissatisfied, always be home-sick, if we are trying to live in any other land.

(2) This thought, too, helps us to understand why men cover evil with a veil of goodness. It is just the longing of the exile or of the emigrant to give a home-like touch to his surroundings. Why do we find an Inverness in Canada? Because men and women from Inverness went there. And why do we find a Glasgow in Canada? Because it reminded these Glasgow men of home. James Chalmers of New Guinea called the first bay he discovered in New Guinea 'Inveraray Bay.' He would never have dreamed of that name had he not been born and spent his boyhood by Loch Fyne. And when we see men taking the names of goodness and labelling their vices and their sins with them, when we note how ready we all are to use a kindly term for some habit or frailty that is most unkindly, surely it is the soul telling where it was born, confessing unconsciously that it is a little home-sick, and trying to give a home-like touch to the far country, just like James Chalmers with his Inveraray Bay.

(3) We can understand the loneliness of sin when we remember this home-sickness of the soul. The man who is home-sick is always lonely. It does not matter how crowded the streets are; the city may be gay and bright and brilliant, but all the stir of it, and all the laughter of it, and all the throng and tumult of the life of it will not keep a home-sick man from being lonely. Nay, sometimes it intensifies his loneliness. Now sin is a great power that makes for loneliness. Slowly but surely, if a man lives in sin, he drifts apart into spiritual isolation. And the strange thing is that the sins we call social sins, the sins that begin in fellowship and company, are the very sins that drive a man apart, and leave him at last utterly alone. That loneliness is home-sickness of the soul. It is the heart craving for home again.

2. *The craving for God.*—(1) We often speak of heaven as our home, and in many deep senses that is a true expression. If in heaven we shall meet again those whom we loved and lost, then heaven will be a home-like place. But in deeper senses heaven is not our home, or if it is, it is just because God is there. In the deepest sense our home is not heaven, but God. You remember how Wordsworth put it in his glorious *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality.* A lesser poet would have written it thus, 'Trailing clouds of glory do we come from heaven which is our home.' But Wordsworth, like a true seer, did not write that, but—'Trailing clouds of glory do we come from God, who is our home.'

> Our God, our help in ages past,
> Our hope for years to come,
> Our shelter from the stormy blast,
> And our eternal home.

God is the true home of the human soul.

We see, then, the meaning of that craving for God which is one of the strangest facts in human history. We do not crave for God because He is glorious. We do not crave for God because He is sovereign. We are just home-sick—that is the meaning of it. We crave for God because He is our home.

(2) Now this home-sickness of the soul for God is one of our surest proofs of God. It is an argument more powerful than any that philosophy affords to convince us that there is a God. Souls still pant for God, and hearts to-day still thirst for Him, as truly as the exiled psalmist did. And unless life be a sham, and unless we were born and fashioned to be mocked, there cannot be home-sickness without a home. Our craving for God assures us that God is. All other arguments may fail us. But this one survives all moods, is strong when we are weak, and brings us to the door of God our home.[1]

Disabilities and Conditions of the Christian Life

Luke xv. 17, 18.—'When he came to himself, he said, I will arise and go to my father.'

According to our Lord's parable, a man turns to God at once when his mind is in a healthy state. The prodigal had not 'been himself' during the unhappy time when he wandered into a far country and consorted with swine

[1] G. H. Morrison, *Sun-Rise*, 1.

and human beings who lived like swine. As soon as he came to himself he returned to his father.

So, then, it is natural for man to be religious. But if a man says that he does not believe in God—that he finds no evidence for His existence—he might be asked this question: Supposing that there is a God—such a God as Christianity tells us to believe in—are you living in such a way that you would recognize Him? Are you laying yourself open to spiritual impressions, if there is a spiritual world? Even the early books of the Old Testament teach us that God speaks not through the wind, or earthquake, or fire, but with a still small voice. Are you likely to hear the still small voice of God, living as you do? Be sure that we can never perceive or understand anything unless there is something corresponding to it in our own selves. A vast number of things escape our notice, even in the external world. It is very much as if we were listening to music played on a piano of which half the notes were dumb. We should hear a queer sort of tune, and form our idea of the musician's meaning by the notes which we heard. So it is in spiritual things. Our ideas about God are determined by what we have seen and known about Him. Incomplete such knowledge must always be; the best and wisest of us sees only the fringes of His ways, and hears a small whisper of His voice. But our faculties may be trained and improved. We see and remember what we understand, and what we are interested in. If an ordinary man goes to see an exhibition of machinery in motion, he is glad to escape after a few minutes, carrying away only a vague impression of wheels going round and hammers falling with a great deal of banging and whirring and humming. But to an engineer every part of the machinery is interesting and instructive. So it is in the case of religion; people who (shocking as it sounds) are not interested in God cannot expect to see Him.

1. Let us consider more in detail what the disabilities are which cut us off from knowing God. We will turn to the Gospels to help us, and, as we might expect, we find them very explicit on this subject.

(1) The first is *selfishness*. This is expressed in the most comprehensive form in that profound saying: 'He that wishes to save his life (his "self," his "soul" it is in the Greek) shall lose it; and he that is willing to lose his self, shall find it.' The command to love is only another form of the same precept. We are to be interested in things outside ourselves—and interest, in its highest power, is love. The man who is his own centre and circumference may be very clever, but he will never be wise. The worth of a man depends not on what he knows, but on what he loves. There is a little poem which expresses this thought very gracefully:

> The night has a thousand eyes,
> And the day but one;
> But the light of a whole world dies
> With the setting sun.
>
> The mind has a thousand eyes,
> And the heart but one;
> But the light of a whole life dies
> When love is done.

Love, sympathy, genuine interest in other people for their own sakes, and in things which do not bear directly on our own private affairs—this is the most essential thing of all.

¶ The ideal of service to man was the rule of Stevenson's life. In all places he seems to have been drawn into some local tussle or other, and impelled to champion the cause of the weak and wronged. In the Samoan troubles he spent his last years in the defence of the natives against the unsympathetic and blundering government of Europeans. He wrote incessantly on their behalf—letters, articles, and a book which cost him infinite labour. He fought for them in meetings to which he went through storm and rain while sick with colic or in the intervals of hæmorrhage. He did this at the risk of trial, prison, and banishment. It is no wonder that the natives loved him, accepted him as a chief among them, and built 'the road of gratitude' to his house. For a man of his temperament and in his health to do so much from pure love of helpless and half-savage fellow-men is surely a very honourable record on the roll of heroic self-sacrifice and service.[1]

(2) The second is *impurity*, regarding which our Lord speaks in equally plain terms: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' Our Lord tells us who are blessed,

[1] J. Kelman, *The Faith of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 210.

not who are cursed; this is always the spirit of His teaching; but of course He means us to understand that those who are not pure in heart cannot see God.

¶ 'Hold off from sensuality,' says Cicero, 'for if you have given yourself up to it, you will find yourself unable to think of anything else.' This is morality.

'Blessed are the pure in heart,' says Jesus Christ, 'for they shall see God.' That is religion.[1]

We must not narrow this beatitude by making it refer only to sensuality; our Lord is thinking also of singleness of aim, purity of intention, as we say. But the life of sensuality, with its continual turmoil of the senses, its alternations of weak self-indulgence and futile self-contempt; above all, with the cruelty and callousness which it produces, is probably, next to selfishness, the most fatal disqualification. How can the God, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, dwell in such a soul as this?

(3) There is one more fatal disability mentioned in the New Testament—*pride*. 'He that exalteth himself shall be abased.' 'Except ye become as little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.' 'God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace unto the humble.' Pride is not the same as vanity, which is a much more superficial fault; pride consists in a radically false estimate of ourselves in relation to the world around us. Pride looks at the world and sees a gigantic figure of self always in the foreground. The awful vistas of eternity, the infinite breadth and depth and height of the love of God, are unseen by the victim of pride, because that distorted image blocks the way. The myriad human lives around him, each of which is playing its part in a vast and complex drama—each of which, too, is a unit, working out the destinies of an immortal spirit—all are seen but dimly, and as it were out of focus, because pride warps the vision. Above all, unless we feel our need, we shall neither ask nor receive any help from God. Like the Laodiceans, the proud man says, I am rich and in need of nothing, and knoweth not that he is wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.

¶ Doré in his 'Illustrations of Dante' depicts with fine effect that incident in the Purgatory where the poet sees a number of spirits labouring under heavy weights of stone. These are the souls of those who on earth have been guilty of the sin of Pride; whose heart was haughty so that they refused to bow the knee or bend the back. Now their backs are crushed down under the grievous load which the artist represents them as carrying. Upon the rock around which the guilty expiate their sin are seen huge sculptured illustrations of men whose pride had made them infamous in history.

2. But let us look now at two *faculties* which are very important without being quite indispensable. They are the love of beauty and intellectual culture.

(1) The *love of beauty* seems to be something thrown in, as it were, by the bounty of God. We could live without it in a fashion. But it is certainly a revelation of God to those who can appreciate it. Of course it must never be treated as a substitute for religion. The worship of beautiful forms alone, especially in human art, is poisonous. But admiration for unspoilt nature and admiration for really great works of art are pure and holy pleasures, through which the visible things of God may be clearly seen, being understood through the things that are made. And perhaps this is worth saying—that the artistic or imaginative representation of things is incompatible with base selfishness. The selfish man remembers only what has baffled or served him; he fails to notice or forgets all else. But the artist, like the religious man, values things as good or bad, and so his view of them is a real help to knowledge of the truth.

(2) Many people think that the *intellect* has nothing to do with religion. They quote our Lord's words about receiving the Kingdom of God as a little child, and St Paul's words about God having chosen the weak things of the world to confound the wise, in this sense. But in reality childhood is the time when the intellect is most active; our minds are then more open to new impressions than afterwards; and though Christianity, the religion of social equality, naturally made its way first among the unprivileged classes, it would not be too much to say that it has always been a learned religion, honouring students and thinkers as well as organizers and missionaries. It would indeed be strange if the intellect, the noblest of God's gifts, could bring us no nearer to Him.

[1] Matthew Arnold.

To sum up, the more completely we can 'come to ourselves,' the more harmoniously we can exercise all the parts of our complex nature, the more readily we shall see the hand of God everywhere, within and without. And the three enemies from first to last are selfishness, pride, and sensuality, which seem nearly to correspond to the devil, the world, and the flesh.[1]

What is Penitence?

Luke xv. 17-20.—'And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father.'

In the Christian redemption it is God who in Christ offers His pardon to men, and so appeals for their penitence. The initiative lies with God. But penitence in this parable corresponds rather to the Old Testament revelation than to the New. Here, as in the 51st Psalm, the initiative seems to be with man, and not with God. The Psalmist believes that if he will bring the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart God will accept it, and will forgive his sin; so the prodigal here resolves to return and make his appeal for pardon in the hope that the appeal will not be vain.

Although the term penitence, derived from the Latin, suggests mainly grieved feeling, and the Greek word *metanoia*, used in the Greek Testament, changed mind, yet penitence, as suggested by the words 'he came unto himself,' involves and affects the whole self, mind, heart, and will alike.

(1) It is for the mind *self-discovery*: 'How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!' (2) It is for the heart *self-contempt*: 'I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.' (3) It is for the will *self-denial*: 'I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee.'

1. *Self-discovery.*—The shame, misery, and want of the prodigal aroused his reason; he began to compare himself as he was in the far country with what he might have been at home. The servants have fullness of bread, the son is in want of it. Thus he begins to realize the penalty of his sin, and thereby to recognize its guilt. It is just here that the penitence of many men begins. They find out that sin does not pay in the long run, that the game is not worth the candle, that the wages of sin are so bad that its gifts are not worth having. This may not be a very high motive to begin with; but still prudence is better than imprudence, and wisdom than folly.

The prodigal discovered himself to be far more miserable than he need have been; but he also confessed himself to be much more guilty. He admitted to himself that it was not his own bad luck, or the fault of his father, or the ill-treatment of others that had brought him to this pass. Nothing can be made of a man until his self-discovery has gone so far that he sees himself not only as miserable but as blameworthy. As long, for instance, as a drunkard blames the drink, or the publican, or his boon-companions, and excuses himself, he is not penitent. He must come to his conscience to be self-condemned before the process of conversion in him has really effectually begun.

This self-discovery may come in different ways. It is not always by realizing the misery that a man recognizes the guilt of sin. One who was used to turn multitudes from sin to God discovered the imperfection of what to others appeared his spotless life when he realized the glory of Christ's moral perfection. Giuseppe Caponsacchi saw himself as the priest who was shaming his calling when he saw the depths of agony in the eyes of Pompilia.

> We are sunk enough here, God knows,
> But not quite so sunk that moments,
> Sure though seldom, are denied us,
> When the spirit's true endowments
> Stand out plainly from its false ones,
> And apprise it, if pursuing
> Or the right way, or the wrong way,
> To its triumph or undoing.[1]

2. *Self-contempt.*—As the prodigal thinks of himself, so he feels about himself. We may imagine that a youth like this when in his home had looked down on the hired servants with contempt, or at least indifference; he expresses

[1] W. R. Inge, in *Practical Questions*, 1.

[1] Browning, *Cristina*.

his own self-contempt by now placing himself on a level with them. Indeed, it is only by an act of the father's grace that he can think of himself as being put even in the place of the hired servants. Reason and conscience, when they thus discover the sinner to himself, cannot but arouse this emotion of self-contempt, of humiliation.

¶ Froude, explaining his religious position in a letter to one of his family, writes: 'I agree with the Evangelicals that if what they call faith—that is, a distinct conviction of sin, a resolution to say to oneself "Sammy, my boy, this won't do" [the reference is to one of Thackeray's characters], a perception and love for what is right and good, and a loathing of the old self—can be put into one, and by the grace of God we see that it can be and is—the whole nature *is* changed, is what we call regenerated.' [1]

There must be some pain and grief at sin before penitence is complete; for it is through the emotions that reason and conscience move the will; and it is by an act of will alone that penitence so places a man before God that he can receive God's pardon. If the self-discovery and the self-disgust do not lead to the resolve of self-denial, the man is pictured for us in the words of James, 'If any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass, for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.' Such a beginning of penitence only hardens the heart the more the oftener it is repeated.

3. *Self-denial.*—Self-discovery and self-contempt lead the prodigal to the self-denial of the resolve to forsake the far country, to return home, to humble himself by confessing his sin, and by submitting himself entirely to his father's will. Such a resolve involved the self-denial of the lusts that had taken him to the far country, of the wilfulness that had made the father's rule irksome, of the pride of independence, and the shame that kept him from return. The lower self in all its desires and impulses had to be denied that the higher self might be recovered. Genuine and effective penitence must always involve such self-denial.

The darling sin must be surrendered; the strongest temptation must be resisted; the greatest sacrifice, if need be, must be effected. We need not make any elaborate distinction between repentance and conversion. The one is the negative, the other the positive aspect of the same process; repentance is the separation of the sinner from his sin, and conversion is the return of the sinner to his God. The Latin word *poenitentia* indicates the grief of the heart; the Greek word *metanoia* the change of the mind, and the word *conversion* points to the decisive act of the will, a turning right round, away from the far country, back to the home.

It is the pardon offered in Christ's Cross that in most men awakens the penitence by which they are crucified unto sin, and the confidence in which they live with Christ unto God. This parable shows us the waiting love of God; which we must ever supplement by the companion parables that present to us His seeking love.[1]

[1] H. Paul, *Life of Froude*, 430.

The Fact of Sin

Luke xv. 18, 19.—'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.'

One characteristic of a true Christian is that he knows sin to be a reality, and strives against it, and that he connects the Cross of Christ with sin. A sense of his own personal sinfulness marks the true follower of Jesus, who, the more he grows in character, becomes increasingly aware of the heinousness of sin. The saints are they who most clearly know themselves to be sinners.

¶ As her nuns knelt around her deathbed, St Teresa magnified the grace that had dealt so wonderfully with her. 'My children,' she exclaimed, 'I have been the greatest sinner in the world!' And she meant it. To others, she may have seemed a paragon of virtue; but, as Francis de Sales observes, 'the defects that are scarcely perceptible to the ordinary run of mortals appear to those who are striving after perfection as the most grave and heinous transgressions.' [2]

1. *What did Jesus say about sin?*—There was a tendency not many years ago in some quarters to divide Christ's earthly ministry into two periods: one, the earlier Galilean period of sunshine and happiness, when our

[1] A. E. Garvie, *The Joy of Finding*, 71.
[2] F. W. Boreham, *A Casket of Cameos*, 158.

Lord looked forward to a speedy triumph of His cause; the other, the later period, when the clouds gathered and He became aware that He would have to meet death at the hands of His enemies. Closely connected with this tendency was the attempt to prove that it is to St Paul we owe our theology of sin, and that Jesus laid little emphasis on human sinfulness. We had a picture drawn of the religion of Jesus as a bright, sunny thing, which taught the universal love of God, bade men be happy and cheerful and free from gloomy doubts or cares, emphasized the duty of kindness and brotherly love, but said very little about any taint of sin in the human heart. In contrast with this picture we were told of St Paul's doleful words in Rom. vii.—'I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I know not; for not what I would, that do I practise; but what I hate that I do . . . so now it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me. . . . O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?' Paul or Jesus, a sour or a sweet religion—that was the antithesis which we were invited to consider.

Criticism has abandoned to-day the hypothesis of two periods in Christ's ministry. The more we study His utterances the more plain does it become that the thought of the Cross was present to His mind from the very first. He began His public work knowing that He had come to die, knowing that it was the very purpose of His mission to offer His life as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. In like manner criticism which is prepared to do justice to all the facts rejects the antithesis Paul or Jesus. St Paul taught nothing which has not its germ in the teaching of Jesus. The controversies with his opponents in which he was engaged led him to emphasize certain aspects of Christian truth, and the emphasis may not always be the same as that which is found in our Lord's teaching; but no one would have been more surprised than St Paul himself had he been told that he was fundamentally altering the religion of which he was an apostle. In this matter of human sinfulness it is simply untrue to say that Jesus minimized sin or said little about it. It was the one evil with which He was mainly concerned. It was human sin which brought Him to earth, and in the fact of sin alone can be found the meaning of His Cross.

We may frankly admit that Jesus did not use technical language about sin; perhaps He does not often employ the word itself. Nor did He tell men that the first step towards reform was to *feel* miserable over their misdeeds. He says nothing about feelings or emotions. He put into the forefront of His teaching the Fatherhood and Love of God, which He said were universal in their range. But it is an entire misrepresentation of His whole attitude towards men to say that He regarded sin as a thing of small importance.

2. *What did Jesus mean by sin?*—We shall best be able to answer this question if we recall to our minds the parable of the Prodigal Son. Think what the lad had done. He had wilfully left his home and his father; he had gone off into a far country and had done what he knew must grieve his father's heart. Then one day a new vision came to him, or perhaps an old vision, which he does not now dismiss from his mind. He sees himself as he is and as he might be. He realizes the meaning of his father's love, realizes that that love is the supreme reality of his life, that it enfolds him and gives purpose to his existence. Compared with this love the pleasures and enchantments of the distant country are unreal; they can never satisfy the deepest needs of his nature. All this he now understands, and he says to himself, 'I will be real again. I will go back to my father and his love. I will go back and tell my father how sorry I am, how foolishly I have behaved, and I will see if I cannot make a fresh start. Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight; and am no more worthy to be called thy son.'

¶ The 51st Psalm is the greatest of the Penitential Psalms; you will remember it begins, Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness, and it is full of evangelical doctrine and refrains. Did you ever notice that Jesus makes the prodigal in Luke xv. reproduce a strain from the 51st Psalm? How do these compare together?

Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight!
Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight.[1]

There we have the story of sin; its origin in wilfulness and self-pleasing; its end, utter ruin;

[1] Rendel Harris, in *The Expository Times*, xxxvii.

its real meaning, a wounding of a heart of Love, the failure to live as a son should live in his Father's house, in loyal obedience to his Father's will. Sin is failure to show the filial temper. The true character of sin comes out when it is set against the background of the Divine Fatherhood. An injury to love is the blackest of injuries. Thus it is that Christ has deepened the sense of sin by His insistence on the Fatherhood of God.

Ah, awful Face of Love, bruised by my hand,
Turn to me, pierce me with Thine eyes of flame,
And give me deeper knowledge of my sin.
So let me grieve; and, when I understand
How great my guilt, my ruin, and my shame,
Open Thy Sacred Heart and let me in.[1]

3. *Have we faced the fact of sin as Jesus faced it?*—Many people think lightly of sin, and speak of it as if it were an amiable weakness. And we are all of us apt to lower our standard, and to think that it does not much matter what we do provided we avoid doing anything very glaringly wrong. The true Christian, however, will always take a serious view of sin, because he will take a serious view of God's purpose in creating him. Our sense of sin will depend on our view of God. If we think of Him as a Holy and Righteous Judge sin becomes an offence against a Divine law. If to the thought of His Holiness we add that of His Fatherhood, then sin, while it still remains an offence against the law which embodies the Divine Will, becomes the ingratitude which wounds a Father's heart. It takes a new colour. We see more clearly its true significance.

If we are to put ourselves right with God, we must begin by doing two things.

(1) We must *be absolutely honest with ourselves*. We must try to see ourselves as we really are. There must be no facile excuses, no saying, 'I am as good as my neighbour,' but there must be the candid examination of will and desire and imagination. The result will put us to shame, and we shall feel humiliated. But it is better to face the truth than to go about victims of a great self-deception.

(2) And then, as part of the same process, we must *face the great fact of God*, and try to grasp what His existence should mean for us. If He is there, if there is this absolutely Holy Will, if He has given me a share in His own nature, if He loves me with an Infinite Love, then the existence of God is the supreme reality of my life. It must affect all I am or do. If I am in earnest, can I do anything else but try to keep close to God and to live as my Father would have me live? Can anything be of more concern to me than so to pass my days as to make some return to my Father who has showered so much love upon me? Must I not seek to root out of my life all that is displeasing to God, all that will wound His Love?

Because Thy Love hath sought me,
All mine is Thine and Thine is mine:
Because Thy Blood hath bought me,
I will not be mine own but Thine.

I lift my heart to Thy Heart,
Thy Heart sole resting-place for mine:
Shall Thy Heart crave for my heart,
And shall not mine crave back for Thine? [1]

[1] R. H. Benson.

Weariness of Responsibility

Luke xv. 19.—'Make me as one of thy hired servants.'

THE motive for these words has been variously understood. Some have accused the prodigal of lingering self-righteousness, as if he were demanding to work for his living, too proud to receive anything on charity. Others have taken them to be a promise of new obedience, in which he asked for a chance of showing how genuine was the change of heart. More usually they have been understood to be simply an expression of humiliation and of shame. He had forfeited his sonship, and entertained no idea of complete restoration. He could only hope now to be admitted as a servant into the house where he had once lived as a son. But there is a further suggestion in the words. The request was not the mere consent to a disagreeable position chosen because it was the lower place. It was a positive choice of that position as the one which he preferred to occupy.

¶ There were three classes of servant in the East: slaves, hired servants, and unhired

[1] Christina G. Rossetti.

servants. The first were mainly captives of war, the second class corresponded more or less to the domestic servants to-day, while the third belonged to a higher stratum of society, and often were drawn from poor relations, or others who hoped to gain advancement by service. These servants occupied a place similar to our upper servants, only that their duties were very light and less menial. Hence the force of those words on the lips of the prodigal son, referring to this difference between the hired and the unhired *diakonoi*: 'Make me as one of thy hired servants,' for, as a poor ruined son, he might naturally have become one of the more honourable unhired servants.[1]

1. The prodigal asked for hired service because he was sick of freedom. There had been a time when freedom was the only thing he wanted. The desire of it had led him away from his home to the far land. The routine of home, the tediousness of that dull person his elder brother, the restraint of a younger son living in his father's house—these had become intolerable to his young blood. He heard the call of the sparkling world beyond the horizon of the homestead. There a man might live without restrictions and go as he pleased.

He went, a lad light-hearted and easily seduced. He found his freedom, and did what he liked. Soon all guidance of his affairs was gone, and he was whirled along in a rush of pleasures, the mere sport of circumstances and of lusts. Freedom is a noble thing, if it be accompanied by a clear mind and a powerful will that keeps its self-control. Freedom is a grand ideal to dream and boast and sing about. It is claimed as the native right and heritage of every man, and it seems little short of sacrilege even to qualify that claim. Yet it must be qualified if it is to be anything but a misleading and dangerous fallacy. It is true in the sense that until he has attained to liberty no man has reached his ideal manhood, or in any full measure come to his own. But it is not true that for all men, or for many men at their present stage, full liberty is a right which it is just for them to claim, or which it would be safe to grant them. To be free to say what one likes and to do what one likes is not the great matter; the great matter, as Matthew Arnold has reminded us, is that what one says and does when free shall be worthy and fitting. Meanwhile the very facts of education and of civilization are standing proofs that only by learning to obey can men attain to a condition in which freedom is safe in their hands. Premature freedom is both a dangerous and a costly gift.

So this prodigal had claimed his freedom before he was capable of managing it, and it had utterly wrecked his life. Now he is, as well he may be, afraid of it, afraid to trust himself. He genuinely and ardently longs for some one to control him, and it is this change of heart that redeems the incident.

¶ Mr Huxley expressed the wish that he could be wound up each day like a watch, and so be sure of going rightly. Such a wish cannot indeed form a standard for any normal condition of life. A far more normal standard is Emerson's injunction, 'Trust thyself.' But here the words of the shamed adventurer are natural and right. They are the expression of that passionate longing for a master and a guide which comes when shame has brought distrust of self.

2. This, then, is the mood of the returning prodigal, who has his speech prepared for the meeting with his father. But that speech was never uttered.

When father and son have met there is no longer any word of hired servants. Fear, shame, distrust of self, the burden of responsibility, are all swallowed up in love. One sight of the father's face, the great embrace of the beloved arm thrown around his rags, the tears that fall upon his neck—these settle all the problems which in cold blood we settle otherwise.

Love took up the harp of Life, and smote on all
the chords with might;
Smote the chord of Self, that, trembling, pass'd
in music out of sight.

Self-distrust even has passed, for love has found a natural and happy solution. No hard responsibilities, to which our moral character is inadequate, are thrust upon us; no unbearable lonely freedom is given us to manage rightly. The responsibilities of life in the father's house are different from those of the

[1] C. Budden and E. Hastings, *The Local Colour of the Bible*, iii. 85.

far country. For the father is there, and we have learned at last to love him, and that love has become a far more commanding law than hired service can ever know.

3. That is the beautiful old story, and there are multitudes who to-day understand it only too well. Their adventure in life has not been successful, and now a great longing has come upon them for rest from responsibilities which they have failed to meet.

(1) Some come to this when sin has proved vain. They have tried self-will, and refused to follow the precepts by which others live. At last they have found out what incompetent fools they were, and how impossible a matter life becomes when it has revolted against its ancient laws. This is an inevitable element in true shame and penitence. Life has proved too much for them. Its very positions of honour and of trust condemn them, as they realize their failure, and they are overwhelmed by a hopeless sense of their own moral and spiritual inadequacy.

(2) Others reach this state of mind rather from a sense of the sheer difficulty of the situation. Their constitution and their circumstances are not equal to the tasks they have to face. Life grows more and more perplexing, and its responsibilities more burdensome. They have come to this that they often cannot tell the right course from the wrong; and now they are too tired to face the situation and are utterly depressed by the sense of their own incapacity. At such times the soul cries out for a master and a law. Give us our orders and we shall obey them. Let the command be definite, the direction unmistakable, and we shall not rebel. However hard the conditions may be, they cannot be so intolerable as the weary and futile attempt to choose and govern.

(3) But God insists. He will give no external law written on tables of stone. He will write His laws only on our hearts. He will not call us servants even in answer to our prayers. He has called us friends and sons of His household, and He will not consent to any less honourable relation. But the love which Christ brings and reveals makes all the difference. That love is indeed the fulfilling of the law, as all those that are labouring and heavy-laden may discover. They are not indeed permitted to lay down their burdens, but they find God bearing their burdens with them. Love changes the look and the feeling of all things. No responsibility is intolerable when in the Father we have found also the Master and the Guide.

¶ 'Go about your daily duties, your reading, your praying, *assuming* that you are God's child, acting in all things as if you were. He will make it all right: He *is* making it all right. You are incapable and helpless — use Augustine's prayers, the prayers of a man who had been for eleven years one of the greatest of the Fathers. 'Take me, Lord, for I cannot give myself; keep me, Lord, for I cannot keep myself.' [1]

Imperfect Contrition

Luke xv. 20.—'But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.'

If this parable could be uncoupled from the name of overwhelming authority attached to it, and could come before the world as a South Sea legend or a fragment of Indian folk-lore, the world would say that the picture, though not without elements of beauty, is disfigured by the extravagance and disproportion of some of its details. No dissolute and undutiful son could ever be taken back upon these easy terms. It is an anomaly to fix the crisis of reconciliation at such an early stage in the history.

1. That is the temper of legalism, which leaves no place for God's grace and is an insult to the love of God's Fatherhood. When Christian believers claim that they possess the assurance of forgiveness, there is not the slightest assumption on their part of ethical superiority. Men of the world may sneer at their claim, but in so doing they are sneering not at the defect and fallibility and moral dinginess of vain, insignificant pietists, but at the vast grace and condescension of God; for Christian assurance does not rest upon what we have achieved in our relation to God, but upon what God is to us. We are not claiming any achievement for ourselves. We are far from what we set ourselves one day to become. There is little resemblance in us to that ideal towards which God is guiding us by His free compassions. We have advanced but a single step towards that.

[1] G. F. Barbour, *The Life of Alexander Whyte*, 368.

And yet if we claim in even this stage that we have felt the embrace of God's great arms of forgiveness about us, we are claiming no more for ourselves than Jesus Christ claimed for us by the glorious analogies of this parable.

What matters it that the world may be unanimous in challenging my professions of penitence? God accepts a penitence that a cynical world overhauls only that it may discredit and spurn. The proud, matter-of-fact casuist may tell me just how many furlongs and perches I am off from the dividing-line of respectability. If that be so I will at least claim that God beams His forgiveness upon me whilst I am still outside that dividing-line. Contrite men may be clasped very close to God's heart whilst still far removed from the admiration and esteem of their brothers.

2. In the rehabilitation of this outcast youth we must not fail to observe that there are two stages, *the human* and *the Divine*, and the Divine must have necessary preference over the human. At the foot of the hill on the outskirts of the old man's farm, or beneath the silver-grey canopy of some wayside olive, or under the walls of the vineyard close by the watch-tower, there was the eager embrace that anticipated confession and gave the wayward youth his lost place in the father's heart, and there was the kiss that wiped out the reproach of past years and restored to him a dower of love almost as rich as when he lay in smiling babyhood on his mother's lap. All that was not only the prerogative of the father's sovereign authority in the household, but the right no less of his unexampled and transcendent love. Between the father and the lad alone that sacred transaction took place.

¶ As an American writer says in a volume of Nature sketches, 'That is not spring we commonly call spring. When the skeleton trees have just awakened into tender life, and the hedgerows are white with hawthorn snows, and the lanes are fragrant with the incense of newly opened flowers, we call that spring. But it is a misnomer. That is early summer. It was spring whilst skies were yet overcast, and bleak winds were blowing, and birds were dumb, for then the sap which produced all these delicate traceries of foliage was restlessly coursing through trunk and branch, and cells were breaking up and rearranging themselves into larger colonies of cells. The first gossamer threads of life were weaving themselves.' All life dawns away from every eye but God's. The world's rude winds would blight if suffered to touch it.

And so with the life of filial love and service and devotion. There is a time when it has nothing but its own past memories and the warm breath of God's secret kiss to foster it. Do not assume you must be able to see it. There is a secret spring of spiritual movement in the heart when that portion of the outward life you can watch is bleak, barren, cloudy as early March. It is present in a very crude and rudimentary state of penitence, indeed, which is sure to challenge the criticism of hearts less loving and indulgent than God's. The true crisis and starting-point of reconciliation is not within the rejoicing household. 'A great way off.'

3. The cast-iron philosopher may hurl his taunts at the man who has been impressed with the idea that godliness is *full of promise for the life that now is*. He may pour contempt on the poor creature who has been influenced by the motives that the Temperance lecturer dangles before him, and who wants good shoes to his feet and a better coat to his back. And yet, defective in all high and noble motive as his repentance may be, God for the time being accepts it. The first movements of the man's mind before it has been transformed by the magic effusion of the father's love cannot escape some stain of the old sordidness. The prodigal on his way back to his lost estate must pass through a stage of imperfect contrition.

If it is the wrath to come rather than the wrath and wretchedness he is leaving behind that excites his first movement towards home, his repentance is still open to *the impeachment of self-interest*. We may readily assent to all that the sceptic says about the defectiveness of the virtue that is stimulated by the slavish fear of hell or the selfish hope of heaven. A virtue of that sort does not conform to all the canons of Christian teaching. The prodigal might be acting just as much from an interested motive as the hired servant, and yet in the imperfect motive that brought him once more within the range of the father's influence and generosity there lay all the possibilities of a restored and

magnanimous sonship. He found the son with much of the ignoble pathway yet to traverse, but he dealt with him notwithstanding as though he had already reached that platform of unselfishness and exalted life to which his imperfect repentance was slowly but surely taking him.

¶ Naturalists tell us that the wolf or jackal is the ancestor of all the existing breeds of dogs. Let us picture some scene in the history of primitive man. A pair of wolves pressed by the severity of a protracted winter come whining round the hut of a savage. Enemies of his race though they are, he takes pity upon their condition, and shares with them some portion of the food he has laid by for winter use. The creatures repeat their visit, and at last begin to show some signs of affection and gratitude to their benefactor. Between the wolves, half-tamed by starvation, and the savage a tie of companionship grows up. The savage musters courage to take them into his homestead, and when the winter is gone trains them to share the labours of the chase. No genuine affinity there, you may be ready to say. The cruel beasts have come to be fed, and the old bloody instincts sleep there still. These creatures are fierce, treacherous, incapable of faithful attachment; but the savage trusts them, and the educating process goes on. Each successive generation is improved and modified. By a process of mysterious evolution the noblest qualities at last unfold themselves, and out of these creatures, brought to the door of the savage by privation and selfishness, you get at last Gelert's hound ready to lay down its life in defending the cradle of its master's child, the sagacious St Bernard that hunts for lost travellers in the snows of the Alps, and the Scots collie that breaks its heart over the death of its master.[1]

4. If the father had waited till the son had reached a higher level of life before bestowing his pitying, pardoning kiss, he would never have greeted him again. The prodigal was reaching the culminating difficulty of his repentance. It was comparatively easy to leave the strange country, for no one was particularly wishful to detain him, and the very face of the country seemed to abjure him by its black desolation to flee. But oh, to pass the threshold, with all the servants' glances turned upon him! That was the crucial difficulty of his return, and if the father had not strengthened him he would have turned faint-hearted and have perished even now.

And all this is true to the deep evangelical science of a soul's restoration to the Father's love. The priest would have fixed a much longer penance than this. He would have told the lad his sin could not be expiated apart from much fasting and many prayers, and possibly purgatorial pains in the life to come. He must plough many an acre, sweep many a floor, make ready many a meal for the household, and then, after a long tale of years, he might come to win some passing gleam of the Father's favour. The priest by his method would have developed the young reprobate into a Pharisee, but out of this dissolute and rebellious prodigal the father wanted to get a contrite and believing child. The son's resolution would have led him to no higher plane of life and feeling than that on which the elder brother stood. The father dare not postpone the recognition till the son had done some little instalment of the work he was fondly planning in his heart. He must needs meet him when he is 'a great way off,' to purge him from his dreams of self-righteous service and base his life upon the love of a free forgiveness.

5. This one sentence of the parable is full of encouragement, but it does not teach universalism. The father met him when he was a great way off, but he had at least crossed the frontiers of the far-off country. It is true the disciplinary agencies of the far-off country, the want, the solitude, the famine, the degradation, were all adjustments of the Father's benign providence, but the Divine face was impenetrably shrouded then. Do not suppose His kiss makes little difference to the destiny of a soul. It means a mighty separation between past and future. Do not presume upon the universal and unending love of God. If you abide in the far-off country, He must look down upon you through the eternal shadows of darkness and famine and loss.

On the other hand, if the words of the prodigal, 'I will arise,' have passed your lips, you may be of good cheer. God will meet you by the way, and accept at your hands a repent-

[1] T. G. Selby, *The Lesson of a Dilemma.*

ance that may be by no means perfect and complete.

I will arise and to my Father go ;
This very hour the journey is begun.
I start to reach the blissful goal, and, lo,
My spirit at one bound her race has run.
For seeking God and finding Him are one.[1]

The Antiphony of Penitence

Luke xv. 21, 22.—'And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him.'

In this chapter we have the substance of our Lord's teaching on the great mystery of repentance and remission of sins. Our text is the epitome of this teaching, and we have a Divine side and a human side to the great mystery. The human side, which is but the response to the Divine overture, is this : 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son' ; and the Divine side is : 'Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and let us rejoice and be glad ; for this my son was dead, and is alive again ; he was lost, and is found.'

We have, then, in the text two main lines of thought : first, the attitude of the penitent towards God ; second, the Divine response to the cry of contrition.

1. *The attitude of the penitent.*—This is expressed in the words, 'Father, I have sinned, and am no more worthy to be called a son ; make me a servant.' There is some difference between the act of repentance in which this expression culminates and the feeling itself in which it takes its rise. Penitence is a state of feeling ; repentance is an act of the will. In the one word stress is laid upon the state of the mind ; the second places stress upon the will—repentance is rising and going to the Father. There may be a quasi-penitential feeling without any repentance at all, and there may be true repentance—and often is—in which there is very little of contrite sorrow for sin.

Repentance is not necessarily a state of feeling ; we may only discover the depth of the pit whence we were digging long after our repentance has been accepted of God. Penitence is one thing ; repentance is another—the climax of a state of mind in which God seeks man before man seeks God, but in which man says : 'I will arise and go to my Father ; I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son ; make me a servant, but have me at home again.' The proper attitude of the penitent is such as is described in the Word before us. One might say we ask nothing of God save that we may be taken out of the atmosphere and the thraldom of sin, placed in His presence, given another chance, though not the chance that was forfeited —'I am no more worthy to be a son ; make me a servant.'

Yes, Thou forgivest, but with all forgiving
Canst not renew mine innocence again ;
Make Thou, O Christ, a dying of my living,
Purge from the sin, but never from the pain.

2. *The attitude of God toward the penitent.*—What is the Divine response to contrition ? The gospel of Christ : 'There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved.' The response is this, 'Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him'—the robe of righteousness, the garment of salvation, a way up from the lowest depths of the valley of humiliation to the shining height of holiness where dwelleth God.

We are often told that we make forgiveness too easy from the pulpit ; the fact is, it is the hardest thing possible to convince a man he has forgiveness at all. The ordinary man associates forgiveness of sin with remission of the consequences. But we are not told that the prodigal went back to share once more the substance that he spent in riotous living. No ; what he wanted was to get back to the father. His attitude was, 'I am no more worthy to be called a son ; make me a servant,' and the antiphony of that cry was, 'My son was dead and is alive again ; bring forth the best robe, and put it on him.'

The Magdalene may become as the brightest saint of God. The man who has forfeited his opportunities may get something better back again. How often we are told in language that seems hopeless—ay, in the language of ordinary

[1] J. C. Earle.

human experience—in the words of Omar Khayyám:

The Moving Finger writes; and having writ,
Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it.

It is a different gospel before us now. The Divine response to the cry of contrition is, 'Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him.' Those who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb are pure and white in the presence of the Father. 'Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson they shall be as white as wool.'

3. There are at least three orders of experience to which the words of our text are specially applicable.

(1) First, the man who has been, and everybody knows has been, a prodigal. It may be he has found his way into a house of prayer, and taken his place among the people of God; but he is not ordinarily to be found there, he scarcely knows why he is there now. Society has closed its doors upon him, and everybody knows he has been punished for his transgression. He cannot go back to the place that he has forfeited.

I wish there were some wonderful place,
Called The Land of Beginning Again,
Where all our mistakes, and all our heart-aches,
And all our poor selfish grief
Could be dropt, like a shabby old coat at the door,
And never put on again.[1]

He cannot be as though he had never sinned; and, what is more, he cannot feel as though he had never sinned. Now, everybody would say it is fitting and right to preach to that prodigal, whom everybody knows to be a prodigal, in the words of the text: 'I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called a son; make me a servant'; but then the antiphony comes—sound of grace and sweetness and mercy!—'Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him.' He is wanted up there, and there is a place for him.

[1] H. P. Patterson.

(2) But there is a second order of experience, not quite so obvious, in which the words of the text are equally applicable. Here sits a man whom people do not know to be a prodigal. He has done well in the world; he has obtained place and power and high repute; he is a great subscriber to things philanthropic and religious. People bow to him, and speak good of his name. He says very little concerning the inner man; but if you could get there and hear his own story: Years ago he purchased his success by a foul and filthy lie, he did a mean and shameful thing, he trampled upon somebody weaker than himself, he sold his soul for gold. He has got what he aimed at; he has succeeded in everything for which he tried; what he lived for and strove for has come to him. Does he want it?

It was not worth doing wrong for—nothing ever is in this world, as said George Eliot. If we could stand again on the other side of sin there is no man but would say that to gain something, to get the very thing he sought, is punishment. A man would rather be without the fruits of his iniquity once he has experienced them. These prodigals that men do not know to be prodigal, these men in a far country feeding upon the husks—don't they want the gospel? and is not this the very gospel that they want?

Every figure fails somewhere, and even our Lord's illustration of the Prodigal Son cannot teach everything that He wanted to teach, and which is contained within His own gospel. From that far country the prodigal has a long journey back to the Father; but the truth is, that in the far country is the Good Shepherd who had come to find His sheep. You would not be troubled about your sin but that God is already thinking about you; and you might say to yourself in the words of a great saint, 'Thou wouldst not seek Him, if Thou hadst not already found Him.' The son said: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee.' The Father says: 'Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him.'

(3) But there is a third order of experience, in which we are all included. Every man and woman who has found his or her way into a place of worship must be conscious, or has been conscious to a greater or less extent, of a great dissatisfaction with things as they are, and they wish that the world had not such a hold upon

them as it has. There is none of us who, when he comes to himself, could say other than this: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me a servant.' We ask for nothing but to get to God, to hold the hand of Christ; nothing but to rescue our manhood, and remake it in the Spirit of our Lord, who died for us.[1]

¶ 'I tell you, Hapgood, that plumb down in the crypt and abyss of every man's soul is a hunger, a craving for other food than this earthy stuff. . . . Light, light—that's what he wants. . . .'

'I've got the secret. I've got the key to the riddle that's been puzzling me all my life. I've got the new revelation in terms good enough for me to understand. Light, more light. Here it is: God is . . . *love*. Not this, that, nor the other that the intelligence revolts at, and puts aside, and goes away, and goes on hungering, hungering and unsatisfied; nothing like that; but just this: plain for a child, clear as daylight for grown intelligence: God is . . . *love*. . . . "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him; for God *is* love."'[2]

The Welcome

Luke xv. 22-24.—'Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.'

'*Bring forth the best robe.*'—The best for the worst! The prodigal had returned home in his rags and uncleanness, with no consistency in his character, his moral raiment torn and stained and threadbare. And here was the possible transformation—that he could be stripped of his defiled and defiling vestment, and clothed in the finest garments in the Father's house. And here is the glorious possibility which shines before all men; holy habits await the most depraved. 'He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, and clothed me with the garments of salvation.' However tattered and torn our life may be we can acquire new habits in Jesus Christ our Lord. In our Father's house we can find new mental habits, and the whole of our thinking can be changed. We can find new moral habits, and can clothe ourselves with splendid motives, and ambitions, and radiant imaginations. And we can find new spiritual habits, habits of devotion, and prayer, and praise. All this constitutes the secret strength and glory of the Christian evangel, that a man can leave his old clothes, exchanging them for the best in the Father's house. 'Who are these that are arrayed in white robes, and whence came they? These are they that came out of great tribulation, and washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'

'*And put a ring on his hand.*'—For he seemed so unlike a son! Almost every sign of sonship had been thrown away! Even the ring had gone, and he had nothing to distinguish him from a slave.

¶ Among the Romans in the time of Christ no one was allowed to wear a gold ring unless he himself, his father, and grandfather were free-born. They had what was called the *jus annuli aurei*. A slave wore an iron ring, and if he became a freedman he could wear a silver ring; but in order to entitle him to wear a ring of gold an express decree of the Senate was required. Thus, among the Romans, the wearing of a peculiar kind of ring was the mark that distinguished the different classes of society, and separated the freeman from the slave. This is the meaning of the act of the father in the parable putting a ring upon the finger of his son when he was restored.

The returning prodigal was delivered from all associations with servitude, and was endowed with the bountiful freedom of the son. And that is just the significance of it for us. We can lose the badge of our servitude; we can throw away every suggestion of it, and just wear the signs and marks of our regal sovereignty in our Father's house. 'Now thou art no longer a bond-slave, but a son.' Thou art home again; thou shalt wear the ring! And all this is filled with wealthy content, which we can realise only by gradual experience. The ring will be found to convey the sense of kinship; there will be a wonderful sense of oneness between the Father and the son. And it

[1] R. J. Campbell, *City Temple Sermons*, 211.
[2] A. S. M. Hutchinson, *If Winter Comes*.

is replete with fine affection; the stream of affectionate energy is continually passing between father and child. And there is mutual understanding, a sharing of secrets, intercourse in the innermost place. And, further, there is a conferring of authority; the son can move about in a gracious freedom. 'Go out, thou once-while beggar, and stride over thy father's broad acres like the son and heir!'

'*And shoes on his feet.*'—He was a footsore, weary pilgrim, with tired, and soiled, and bleeding feet. Did the father do to him what our Lord did to His own disciples: 'He began to wash their feet'? The prodigal's feet had been in the ways of sin, and he found it difficult to walk in the ways of righteousness. 'Shoes on his feet.' The Father will give us ease and comfort in our goings. For there is much of the pilgrim-road still awaits us even when we have returned to our Father's house. There are ups and downs, hills and valleys, moor and fen and torrent, and we shall need to have feet well prepared for the journey. And this is part of the gracious ministry of the Father to His children. Our feet become shod 'with the preparation of the gospel of peace.' We are ready for any kind of road—through the green pastures or the stony way, rough and torn into sharp flints by heavy floods—ready for the way to the marriage altar, ready for the way to the grave. The Lord fortifies our feet; we can march over every road with comfort and decision.

¶ One night a minister was called to the bedside of a dying boy in one of the great London hospitals. There had been an operation; things had gone wrong; and the boy had fallen into a troubled sleep, from which, the nurse said, he might not waken. The minister sat down in the glimmering ward and listened to the laddie as he talked in a half-delirium. He had been a keen Scout, and now some exploit from the past had come back with a present urgency. He was wading through a stream, and his shoes, which he had tied together and slung across his shoulders, had slipped and were lost in the current.

The minister felt then that God was giving him a message. Leaning over the pillow he whispered to the boy, who became suddenly silent at the sound of a voice, these two texts: 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee.' 'Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put shoes on his feet.' Then, added the minister: 'There will be new shoes for you on the other side.'[1]

'*And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat.*'—The best food in the house for the one who has just been starving! What a welcome! The daintiest thing in the pastures had to be brought out to express and emphasize the joy of the Father's heart. So is it with all of us when we come home to God. It matters not that we have been famine-stricken, or that we have been eating things that were poisonous and fatal to the peace of our souls. Once at home the Lord brings out His best provision. He will give us the best food for the mind! 'If any man lack wisdom let him ask of God.' He will give us the best food for the will. There is no will-food like that which is imparted to the man when the Lord restores his soul. He will give us the best food for the affections, real nutriment to keep the heart alive, and to make our love vigorous and strong. 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.'

'*And be merry!*'—The normal type of the Christian life is not found in the funeral, but in the marriage. But the merriment is a natural product, not a manufactured article. It is a fruit of the Spirit. Certain conditions are observed, and the merriment inevitably follows. Get back into the Father's house, and have the freedom of sonship, and all the privileged intercourse of home, and the soul will sing because it must.

'*For this my son!*'—Aye, that is the supreme music, to hear the Father speak to us as 'my son,' 'my daughter'—that is the true glory of heaven. Think of the dignity of it, and the glory of it, and what it would mean to a man who had been dwelling by the swine-troughs, and who had wasted all his substance in riotous living! To have the father meeting him on the threshold with the glorious words 'My son' made the lad's heart beat with a holy expectancy which was itself the beginning of the blessing of reconciliation. 'This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'[2]

[1] K. Williamson, *The Uncarven Timbers*, 53.
[2] J. H. Jowett.

Doubt not thy welcome! All beside have changed,
But He is changeless; He is always Love;
And in His house He does not keep for thee
A servant's place!
O, wanderer, come home!
Thou art His own, and all He has is thine.[1]

Refusing to go in

Luke xv. 28.—'He was angry, and would not go in.'

Two things seem to need consideration in connection with the conduct of this brother—first, the reasons which kept him from entering the home that night; second, what he missed by thus refusing to enter.

1. First, then, looking at the man, why was it that he refused to enter?

(1) *He could not understand his father's ways.*—Doubtless he had always loved his father. Doubtless he had always honoured him. He had never before questioned his sagacity, or dreamed of thinking of him as unjust. But now, in the hour of the prodigal's return, when the house was ablaze with light and loud with merriment, all he had cherished of his father's justice seemed to be scattered to the winds of heaven. Was *this* the way to receive back a prodigal? Was not this to put a premium on folly? Was it fair to him, so faithful and so patient, that a reckless ne'er-do-weel should have this welcome? He could not understand his father's ways.

Is this the only man who has stood without because of irritating thoughts like these? Are there none who will not enter because they cannot understand the Father's dealings? They cannot fathom the mysteries of Providence. They cannot understand the cruelties of nature. They cannot grasp the meaning of the cross, or see the power of the death of Jesus. To all such we say that the one way to understand the Father's dealings is to come at once into the home. For the ways of God are like cathedral windows, which to those outside are dim and meaningless, and reveal their beauty and their story only to those who are within.

(2) *He was indignant with his brother.*—He was indignant that one with such a character should have a place at all within the house. It is not likely that he ever loved his brother, and perhaps his brother had never much loved him. There was such a difference between their natures that they could hardly have been the best of comrades. For the one was always generous to a fault, and always getting into trouble somewhere; and the other was a pattern of sobriety, and as cautious as he was laborious. Such Jacobs—and they are found in every region—are always a little contemptuous of Esaus. Secretly they despise them and their singing, and they cannot understand why people love them. And when they find that they are home again, and that all the household is in revelry, then are they angry and will not go in. So was it with this person in the parable. Many stand outside—are angry and will not go in—for a reason precisely similar to that.

¶ 'I remember,' says Dr Morrison, 'a young man coming to me in Dundee to tell me why he would never join the Church. It seemed that in the place of business where he worked there was a young woman who made a great profession. And all the time that she was busy in attending meetings and acting as a monitor, she was engaged in pilfering the till. "*And he was angry, and would not go in.*" He was very indignant with his sister. He said, "If these are the kind of people who are *in*, then it is better that I should be *without*."'

(3) *He trusted to the reports of others.*—He did what is always a foolish thing to do—he went on the information of the servants. Had he gone right in and seen things for himself, the night for him had had a different issue. One look at his brother might have softened him, there were such traces of hell about his face. But instead of that he went to the stable door, where the ostler was loafing and listening to the music, and he, the first-born of his father's family, was content to get his information *there*. Now of course we know that he was told the truth. 'Thy brother is come, and they are making merry.' But might not the truth be told in such a way as would irritate and rankle just a little? It was partly the servants' tone that made him angry. He took his report of that most glorious night from men who knew nothing of its inner mystery.

There are multitudes outside to-day because they have taken the report of others who are incapable of judging rightly. Are you quite sure that your reports of Jesus are taken from

[1] E. H. Divall, *A Believer's Rest*, 171.

those who know Him and who love Him? Are you quite sure that in your thoughts of Christ there is no travesty of what is true? There is something in the gospel which is never understood except by those who have experienced it.

¶ Mr John Drinkwater expresses the same thought in the line:

'He serves us best who sings but what he sees.'

The counsel of the greatest of experts in the cure of souls, when they told Him of a very grave and far-reaching lapse into doubt of one of the spiritual stalwarts of his day, was, 'Go and shew again those things which ye do hear and see.' It is the only way in which we can help the spiritual sickness of our own day and generation. So many doctors of the soul have failed because they have been trying to show things which they have neither heard nor seen, imagining that in the substitution of orthodox presentation for personal experience they were doing God service, if not man.'[1]

2. So much, then, for the elder brother's reasons. Now let us see what he missed.

(1) *He missed just what he most needed.*—Think of it, his day's work was over. He was coming home in the evening from the field. Like a faithful servant, he had been hard at work, driving the furrow or building up the fences. Now the labours of the day were over. And he was hungry and he needed food. He was weary and he needed rest. He was soiled and stained with his day's work, and he wanted a change of raiment in the evening—and all that he needed in that evening hour was stored and treasured in his father's house. 'And he was angry, and would not go in.' He missed the very things that he was needing.

Is not that always the pity of it, when a man refuses the love of Jesus Christ? Is he not missing just what he most needs, and needs the more, the more he has been faithful? For all of us are soiled and we need cleansing; and all of us are weak and we need strength, and all of us are hungering and thirsting, and Christ alone can satisfy that hunger.

(2) *He missed the merriment and gladness.*—He missed what some folk would not miss for worlds — an excellent dance and a good supper. Think of him, standing out under the stars, a man alone and out of touch with everybody. And then, to make it worse to bear, the sound of the music floating through the yard, and he could see how happy they all were, as the figures passed beyond the lighted window. The man was bitten by the fiercest jealousy. He was hurt; he was offended; he was miserable.

Ah! what a right some have to know the joy and feasting of the Lord! How they have been prayed for since they were little children! And yet they are the very people who stand without, and will not enter in, and miss the gladness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

(3) *He missed his chance of making others happy.*—Although he may never have thought it so, his absence was the one shadow on that feast. He was not at all the kind of man who is the life and soul of any gathering. And yet that night—that night and that alone—*his* presence would have been the crowning gladness; his absence was the one dark shadow upon a happiness which was like that of heaven.

Have you ever thought of the happiness you would give by coming in? It is a great vocation to make others glad. And the wonderful thing about our Lord is this, that when you trust Him, and make others glad, in that very hour you become glad yourself, and win what you have craved for all along.

[1] Hubert Simpson, *Put Forth by the Moon*, p. xv.

Ill-temper

Luke xv. 28.—'He was angry, and would not go in.'

Those who have studied the paintings of Sir Noel Paton must have observed that part of their peculiar beauty lies, by a trick of art, in their partial ugliness. There are flowers and birds, knights and ladies, gossamer-winged fairies and children of seraphic beauty; but in the corner of the canvas, or just at their feet, some uncouth and loathsome form—a toad, a lizard, a slimy snail—to lend, by contrast with its repulsiveness, a lovelier beauty to the rest. So in ancient sculpture the griffin and the dragon grin among the angel faces on the cathedral front, heightening the surrounding beauty by their deformity.

Many of the literary situations of the New Testament powerfully exhibit this species of contrast. The twelve disciples—one of them is a devil. Jesus upon the Cross, pure and regal

—on either side a thief. And here, as conspicuously, in this fifteenth chapter of Luke, the most exquisite painting in the Bible touched off at the foot with the black thunder-cloud of the elder brother—perfect, as a mere dramatic situation.

But this conjunction, of course, is more than artistic. The association of these two characters—the prodigal and his brother—side by side has a deep moral significance.

1. When we look into sin, not in its theological aspects, but in its everyday clothes, we find that it divides itself into two kinds. We find that there are sins of the passions, including all forms of lust and selfishness, and sins of the temper. The prodigal is *the* instance in the New Testament of sins of passion; the elder brother, of sins of temper.

One might say, at a first glance, that this sin of the elder brother is a mere trifle, only a little bit of temper, and scarcely worthy the recording. What was this little bit of temper then? For Christ saw fit to record it. The elder brother, hard-working, patient, dutiful—let him get full credit for his virtues—comes in from his long day's work in the fields. As he nears the old homestead, he hears the noise of mirth and music. 'Thy brother is come,' the servant says, 'and they have killed the fatted calf.' His brother! Happy hour! how long they mourned for him! But no—there is no joy on that face. 'Brother, indeed,' he mutters; 'the scapegrace! Killed the fatted calf, have they? More than they ever did for me. And talk of the reward of virtue! Here have I been all these years unhonoured and ignored, and this young *roué* from the swine-troughs assembles the whole country-side to do him homage.' 'And he was angry, and would not go in.'

¶ This self-righteous mood — no uncommon one—finds expression in one of George Eliot's characters. 'As for being saved without works,' says Mrs Holt, 'there's a many, I daresay, can't do without that doctrine; but I thank the Lord I never needed to put *my*self on a level with the thief on the cross. I've done *my* duty, and more, if anybody comes to that; for I've gone without my bit of meat to make broth for a sick neighbour: and if there's any of the church members say they've done the same, I'd ask them if they had the sinking at the stomach as I have; for I've ever strove to do the right thing, and more, for good-natured I always was.'[1]

2. One of the first things to startle us about sins of temper, is their strange compatibility with high moral character. The elder brother, without doubt, was a man of high principle. Like a dutiful son he chose his career. He would be his father's right hand, and cheer and comfort his declining years. So to the servants he became a pattern of industry; to the neighbours an example of thrift and faithfulness; a model young man to all the country, and the more so by contrast with his vagabond brother. For association with lofty character is a painful circumstance of this deformity. And it suggests strange doubts as to the real virtue of much that is reckoned virtue and gets credit for the name. In reality we have no criterion for estimating at their true worth men who figure as models of all the virtues. Everything depends on motive. The virtues may be real or only apparent, even as the vices may be real though not apparent. Some men, for instance, are kept from going astray by mere cowardice. So it comes to pass that many very mean men retain their outward virtue. Conversely many of those who sow to the flesh regard their form of sin as trifling compared with the inconsistent and unchristian graces of those who profess to sow to the spirit. Many a man, for example, who thinks nothing of getting drunk, would scorn to do an ungenerous deed or speak a withering word.

3. Passing now from the nature and relations of sins of this peculiar class, we come to look at their effects. And these are of two kinds—the influence of temper on the intellect, and on the moral and religious nature.

(1) Temper interferes with the intellect in all matters of judgment. A quick temper really incapacitates for sound judgment. Decisions are struck off at a white heat, without time to collect grounds or hear explanations. Then it takes a humbler spirit than most of us possess to reverse them when once they are made. We ourselves are prejudiced in their favour simply because we have made them, and subsequent courses must generally do homage to our first precipitancy.

[1] George Eliot, *Felix Holt*.

¶ Archbishop Fénelon wrote his *Telemachus* as a guide for the heir-apparent to the throne of France. His concluding advice is: 'Above all things be on your guard against your temper. It is an enemy that will accompany you everywhere, to the last hour of your life. Temper causes the greatest affairs to be decided by the most paltry reasons; it obscures every talent and paralyses every energy. It will make you *lose the most important opportunities*, and will inspire you with the inclinations and aversions of a child.'

No doubt the elder brother secretly confessed himself a fool the moment after his back was turned on the door. But he had taken his stand; he had said 'I will not go in,' and neither his father's entreaties nor his own sense of the growing absurdity of the situation—think of the man standing outside his own door—were able to shake him. Temptation betraying a man into an immature judgment, that quickly followed by an irrelevant action, and the whole having to be defended by subsequent conduct, after making such a fuss about it—such is the natural history on the side of intellect of a sin of temper.

Apart from the consequences to the individual, another peculiarity of sins of temper is that their worst influence is upon others. It is generally, too, the weak who are the sufferers; for temper is the prerogative of superiors, and inferiors, down to the bottom of the scale, have not only to bear the brunt of the storm, but to sink their own judgment and spend their lives in ministering to what they know to be caprice. So their whole training is systematically false, and their own mental habits become disorganized and ruined.

¶ Of my husband's father it is difficult to write. He was extremely pleasant to look at, but was not easy to live with. His assumption of his right to the best of everything, be it food, the easiest seat in the carriage, or the only umbrella, and of its being the first, if not the sole, duty of his wife to serve him, was very trying to witness, and I have often seen my young husband turn away with a gesture of impatient self-control.

'Why do you allow him to be so selfish?' I indignantly said to Mrs Barnett one day when he had kept her and my husband, who was unwell, sitting in the carriage waiting in the noisiest city thoroughfare until he chose to come.

'Ah! my dear,' she said, 'it does not do to vex him, for it's what comes after,' and I slowly learnt that what 'came after' were long days of unbroken sulkiness, which hung like a pall over the household, stifling the very life out of the finer natures of his wife and sons.[1]

(2) But it is in their moral and social effects that the chief evil lies. It is astonishing how large a part of Christ's precepts is devoted solely to the inculcation of happiness. How much of His life, too, was spent simply in making people happy! There was no word more often on His lips than 'blessed,' and it is recognized by Him as a distinct end in life, to secure the happiness of others. Holiness, of course, is a great word, but we cannot produce that in others. That is reserved for God Himself, but what is put in our power is happiness, and for that each man is his brother's keeper.

See how the elder brother's explosion of temper spoiled the happiness of a whole circle. Then look at the effect on the father, or on the guests, or even on the servants—that scene outside had cast its miserable gloom on the entire company. But there was one other who felt it with a tenfold keenness—the prodigal son. We can imagine the effect on him. This was home, was it? Well, it was a pity he ever came. If this was to be the sort of thing, he had better go. Yes, we drive men from Christ's door many a time by our sorry entertainment. The Church cultivates her faith and proclaims her hope, but forgets that a greater than these is charity.

¶ Dr Whyte rejoiced in every form of goodness and in the ideal of Christian charity—ever to see and to proclaim the best in others. Unaffected as was his appreciation of the 'once-born' type of goodness, it was towards the 'twice-born' that the whole bent of his spirit lay, and the whole strength of his preaching and his pastoral care of souls was directed. This represented to him the full fruit and perfection of the Christian order. The one fault which strained his own charity to breaking-point was the lack of charity in others. On the rare occasions when a severe judgment of a man or a book escaped him, this was almost invariably the ground of his stricture. And one motto which he had printed on a small card was —'Is it *true*? Is it *kind* to repeat it? Is it

[1] *Canon Barnett*, i. 14.

necessary to repeat it?' Few men have known more of the weakness of human nature, and have yet so consistently practised the precept, 'Judge not!' or shown forth the charity that 'thinketh no evil.' [1]

4. This treatment of the sin suggests a further topic—its cure. Christianity professes to cure anything. If there is no provision for that, then Christianity stands convicted of being unequal to human need. What course, then, did the father take, in the case before us, to pacify the angry passions of his ill-natured son? He made no attempt in the first instance to reason with him. To do so is a common mistake, and utterly useless both with ourselves and with others. The malady has its seat in the affections, and therefore the father went there at once. Reason came in its place, and the son was supplied with valid arguments against his conduct, but he was first plied with *love*.

It is quite idle, by force of will, to seek to empty the angry passions out of our life. The soul is to be made sweet, not by taking the acidulous fluids out, but by putting something in—a great love, God's great love. This is to work a chemical change upon them, to renovate and regenerate them, to dissolve them in its own rich fragrant substance. If a man let this into his life, his cure is complete; if not, it is hopeless.

The curtain drops on the story of the prodigal, leaving him *in*, but the elder brother out. And why is obvious. It is impossible for such a man to be in heaven.[2]

Our Duty towards our Equals

Luke xv. 28.—'He was angry, and would not go in.'

THE moral failure of the elder brother is very significant in one respect. It was a failure in the sphere of duty to an equal. As a son he had given every satisfaction, and with a good conscience he insists on that. Probably, too, no fault could be found with him in his practical management of the estate, or in his conduct towards the servants on the farm. Towards his superior—for in Jewish eyes the superiority of fatherhood is great—towards his superiors he was all that could be wished for. Towards his inferiors he was blameless, and no fault attaches to him there. The point to be noted is that where he failed was in his duties towards his equals. True, one was older and the other younger; one had the privileges of the first-born. Yet were they brothers, born of the same mother, sharers together of the home of infancy. And this was the point of failure in his life, not his duty to superiors or to inferiors, but his duty to one whose birth and upbringing put him on the platform of equality.

1. On the matter of our duty to our equals the New Testament is comparatively silent. It speaks to us, not infrequently, of the duty which we owe to our superiors. Men are to reverence those who sit in Moses' seat; they are to render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; they are to pray for kings and all who are in authority. It also speaks constantly of our duty to inferiors. But as we read the Gospels and Epistles we gradually become aware of a strange silence—it is the comparative silence of the gospel on the matter of our duty to our equals. That does not mean that such duties were of little consequence to the men who have given us our New Testament. It means that there were certain causes which inevitably put the emphasis elsewhere.

(1) In the first place, there was that new humility which was present so powerfully in Christian character. Working in the heart of the new-born, it did not suggest equality at all. When Peter, overpowered and awestruck, cried, 'Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man'; when Paul, in the ripeness of his vast experience, thought of himself as just the chief of sinners, we have a frame of mind that was widespread, and was the peculiar creation of the gospel, and yet a frame that was far from ready to assert equality with anybody. Similarly, the only greatness in the kingdom lay in being a servant in the kingdom. It was to him who took the lowest place that Christ promised the blessing and the honour. We can readily understand then how men, dominated by a new-born humility, were not in a mood to give immediate prominence to the duties which imply equality.

(2) The second reason is to be found in the gospel message of compassion. That was so new, and so amazing, that for a little it obscured

[1] G. F. Barbour, *Alexander Whyte*, 374.
[2] H. Drummond, *The Ideal Life*, 43.

all else. There may be elements in the ethic of the gospel which were familiar to the older world. That is exactly what we should expect since God has never left Himself without a witness. But there was one thing in the gospel which was new, and which set it apart from all the thought of ages, and that was its magnificent insistence on the need and the blessing of compassion. It was the Christian's mark to help the poor, to cheer the solitary. He went to the least and lowest of mankind, in the great love wherewith his heart was burning. And you cannot wonder that that great enthusiasm, so utterly unknown in paganism, pushed into the background, as it were, the statement of our duty towards equals.

(3) But there is another reason, not opposed to these, yet standing just a little apart from them. It is the fact that Christian morality is so vitally dependent upon Christ. Paul never thought of morals by itself. He never spoke of isolated ethics. For him to live—in every realm of life—was Christ. Now the very foundation of the Church was this, that Jesus Christ had no equal. Neither in heaven above nor on earth beneath had Jesus Christ a duty to His equal. Of course it does not follow that we have none because our incomparable Lord had none. To assert that would have been blasphemy. But we can understand how to men for whom Christ was all and in all the subject of duty towards equals was not one that would be largely handled.

2. There are no duties harder to perform, as there are none more beneficial to the character, than the duties we owe to our equals. Let us recall one or two facts which indicate how commonly men fail here.

(1) In the first place, we may see it in the narrow compass of the family circle. There are, it is to be feared, many homes where the spirit of the elder brother still survives. Take each member of the circle separately, and you find each to be amiable and useful. One may be in an office, one a nurse, one a diligent visitor of the poor. And all these duties they faithfully fulfil, working for those set over them most loyally, or cheering, by the word and deed of comfort, the poor who are entrusted to their charge. No fault can be found with them in these relationships. But where they fail is in the family circle, where the only duties that have place are the duties that we owe towards our equals.

(2) In the second place, we witness the same thing in the larger area of a common calling. It is notorious how little sympathy there often is between those who are brothers in vocation. A doctor may say more unkind things about a brother doctor than about any other person in the world. And Ian Maclaren confesses that the quarrels of authors, together with their calamities, afforded the elder Disraeli substance for a volume, and the sensitiveness of painters and actors, of singers and those who play on instruments, is one of the amazing paradoxes of human life. It is not with inferiors that the strain comes; it is in the circles where all stand alike, and are on the social footing of equality.

¶ We have a hint of this feeling in the recently published *Letters of Queen Victoria*, where we read that in the early years of her widowhood the Queen gave herself wholly to her sorrow and could with difficulty be persuaded to take up any of her public duties again. Towards the end of this period, a period marked by the consequent estrangement between Queen and people, the King of the Belgians wrote to her: 'Our own dreadful loss put Bertie and Alix (later King Edward and Queen Alexandra) forward. He and his wife are constantly before the public in every imaginable shape and character, and fill entirely the public mind. The English are very personal. To continue to love people they must see them.'

The Queen acted upon the hint. A few days later she drove through London in an open carriage to attend a public function, and in a subsequent letter to her uncle she added these words: 'Everyone said that the difference shown when I appeared and when Bertie and Alix drive was not to be described. Naturally, for them no one stops or runs, as they always did, and do doubly now, for me.' [1]

(3) And in the third place, is there not a proof of this in the attitude of society towards its failures? Suppose a man to be prospering in the world, is he not a target for a good deal of malevolence? Is it not rarely that we hear him generously judged, with a noble forgetfulness of his faults? But let that man meet with some great reverses, and the whole thing is changed. There may be one or two who say 'I told you so,' and who gloat over the mis-

[1] *The Letters of Queen Victoria.*

fortune of a brother. There are far more who for the first time become generous, and forget old grudges and offences, and they do it then and then alone, when their neighbour has passed from his equality.

3. What is the explanation? It is this, that in all our intercourse with inferiors there is no place for jealousy or envy. There is nothing to interfere with our self-love; there is no possibility of competition. And therefore in all intercourse with them there is a sense of shelter and security, an utter absence of those irritations which are inevitable with our social equals.

Be chary of accepting any verdict except the verdict of equality. Distrust the subtle flattery of deference. There is no self-knowledge to be gained that way. If you want to know yourself go to your equals—find what you think of them, and they of you. Reckon yourself by what you are at home, or with your brother merchant or your brother minister. It is thus, and thus alone, we learn the truth, and when we learn the truth we are never far from Christ. Seeing ourselves, we see our need of Him, and in that sight is the beginning of salvation.[1]

The Elder Brother

Luke xv. 31.—'And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.'

In considering the story of the Elder Brother, let us dwell upon our Lord's ideal: 'Child, thou art ever with me'—the Greek word, here translated 'son,' includes both son and daughter—'Child, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.' Now there are three things which ought to be characteristic of our life day by day: first, the community of nature: 'Child'; then the community of interest: 'Thou art ever with me'; and finally the community of possession: 'All that I have is thine.'

1. *The Community of Nature: 'Child.'*—We are children when we have been born of the Spirit of God. Whether we remember the place and the time, or whether the new life of God came over our soul as the dawn comes over the sky, there must have been an hour in our life when the seed of God entered our nature, and we were born, 'not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.'

¶ F. B. Meyer tells us that when he was quite young he was extremely anxious because he could not remember any such special time. Then he heard Spurgeon say one day that a man might be quite sure he was alive even though he didn't know his birthday. This dissipated all his doubt. He knew that he loved God and good things, and therefore believed that he had been born of the Spirit and could repeat the words in their inner meaning—'Father, I am Thy child.'

Now that word 'child' is urgent. It might be rendered 'child of my heart.' That is where to begin with Christian people—with the fact that they are partakers of the Divine nature. It is not much good going about the world finding fault with people unless they have in them something upon which to build, unless they present something upon which one can lay hold. You may be full of failure, full of sin, and you may be disheartened by constant shortcomings, but in your heart, in your life, you have the beginnings of God's own nature.

2. *The Community of Interest: 'Child, thou art ever with me.'*—That preposition 'with' is interesting. It is the preposition of fellowship. It is as though the father said to this elder son of his: 'You know how you and I have sat over the breakfast table, and in the harvest season discussed the reapers and their work. We have taken counsel together when we have bought a new piece of land. There is nothing on this farm that you and I have not talked about. In the morning we have laid our plans; at night we have calculated the results. At the end of the year we have summed up our profits of agriculture, and of the flocks and herds. You and I have been on terms of perfect friendship.'

And Jesus has said that if we were living as we should, we should be on just such terms with God, and God would talk with us as a man talks with his son over the breakfast table. There would be an open door between God and the soul. It is not necessary to go down on our knees each time we talk with Him. We can talk to Him when we are walking along the road, when we are sitting at a meal, when we are on our beds.

[1] G. H. Morrison, *The Return of the Angels*, 152.

Not in the silence only,
Nor in the solitude,
Let my thoughts rise to thee in praise,
My God, so great, so good:
But 'mid the din and noise
Of city conflict rude;
In crowded street, where daily pours
The hurrying multitude.[1]

All the time there may be such communication between the soul and God as there is between a river and the sea; especially a tidal river, by which the sea sends up its tides into the heart of the country. That ought to be a symbol of our life. There should always be an open channel towards God that the great tide of His nature may flow into our soul.

¶ One evening some of us heard Chopin's great Nocturne in C Sharp Minor played by that wonderful little elfin old man who interprets Chopin to us as none other living can do. The printed programme set forth the usual banal explanations of what people have thought was in Chopin's mind and heart before he sobbed it forth upon the strings. One said, 'It is the gloomiest and grandest of Chopin's moody canvases'; another, 'The sudden outburst of quickly passing passion followed by accents of despair—all of which seem to speak of the tragedies of life.' But those of us who heard will never forget how, before he seated himself at the piano, the little *maestro* came forward with that unearthly smile of his, and told us the secret. 'I must tell you; it is very interesting. Chopin told Liszt, and Liszt told me. In this piece all is sorrow and trouble—oh! such sorrow and trouble—until he begins to speak to God, to pray: and then it is all right.' That is the burden of all the low-toned nocturnes of life. All is sorrow and trouble until we turn to God.[2]

3. *The Community of Possession: 'All that I have is thine.'*—That was the father's view of things. The elder son did not see it, though the prodigal did. When the father gave the property to his younger son, and the younger son took his goods and moved into the far country, he at least believed that the things belonged to him. The mistake the prodigal made was that he made the wrong use of the property in taking it from the father's sight and presence. The prodigal was justified in looking upon what was given to him as for use; where he was wrong was in abusing it. The elder brother, on the other hand, appears never to have really understood that the father's living was divided between both of them. He had never realized that his father had actually given him his livelihood—'his life,' as the Greek says. Our Lord teaches that all God's life, all God's livelihood, is at the disposal of the soul. 'All mine is thine,' Jesus said, in the seventeenth chapter of John; here the Father says: 'All mine is thine.'

But think of the poverty of life in which many of us are living—the miserable life that cannot resist temptation, that cannot stand against the power of evil, that is unhealthy, morbid, and impotent! God meant that we should share His life. *All* God's life is for us, and the mistake that we make is that we live in the energy of our own nature instead of absorbing and appropriating and breathing in the very life of the Eternal God.

O Love triumphant over guilt and sin,
My soul is soiled, but Thou shalt enter in;
My feet must stumble if I walk alone,
Lonely my heart till beating by Thine own;
My will is weakness till it rest in Thine,
Cut off, I wither, thirsting for the Vine;
My deeds are dry leaves on a sapless tree,
My life is lifeless till it live in Thee![1]

[1] Horatius Bonar.
[2] Hubert Simpson, *Put Forth by the Moon*, 34.

Sleep and Death

Luke xv. 32.—'This thy brother was dead, and is alive again.'
Mark v. 39.—'The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.'

Let us consider some of our Lord's references to death. We shall look at death just as a fact, as joy and sorrow and love and hate are facts, and ask what our Saviour has spoken about that. For those who believe in Christ as Lord it is supremely important to discover that. But it is scarcely less important for those who take a lower view. For the words of Jesus Christ, whoever Christ was, have influenced the world and altered history in a way as profound as it is unapproached.

[1] F. L. Knowles.

1. When we study Jesus with this end in view, there is one thing which immediately impresses us. It is that Jesus in His ministry spoke comparatively little about death. Familiar with it in the home at Galilee (for Joseph had died when Jesus was still there), lighting oftentimes in boyish wanderings on ghostly sepulchres among the hills, there is no sign that He brooded upon death, or let it colour His imagination. That He spoke much of the life beyond the grave is a fact, of course, which nobody disputes. But of the fact of death—that shrouded enemy which lays its icy hand on all humanity—of that He spoke comparatively little.

Now that at once separates Jesus from those Stoical teachers who were already beginning to take the ear of Rome. For they, as Bacon has so wisely put it, made death more terrible by dwelling on it so. They thought to conquer death by gazing at it, till familiarity should beget contempt, and instead of contempt there came a haunting terror on the men and women of the Roman empire.

Our Lord's comparative silence grows more notable when we bear in mind two considerations.

(1) The first is the old familiar commonplace that death is a universal thing. There have been teachers who have avoided universal themes and loved to handle exceptional experiences. Some of our finest plays, like *Hamlet*, deal with experiences of the rarest kind. But Jesus deliberately chose the universal, and dealt with what is common to humanity, and touched with the finger of a son of man the strings that God has put on every harp. The sorrows He soothes are universal sorrows; the joys He shares in are universal joys. The questions He answers are universal questionings; the hopes He kindles are universal hopes. Yet here is death, the universal leveller, stealing with equal foot to every door, and Jesus speaks very little about that.

(2) The other consideration which makes the silence notable is the significance to Christ of His own death. That His own death was profoundly important in His eyes no unbiased reader of the Gospels can deny. When He was deeply stirred He spoke of it. It was the one topic of the Transfiguration. He watched with eagerness for every sign of readiness that He might unfold its meaning to the twelve. And yet though He saw the coming of the cross, and knew that His triumph was to include a grave, the theme of the grave was rarely on His lips.

2. Jesus' silence regarding the grave is a very suggestive and significant fact, and it clearly calls for some interpretation.

(1) Let us dismiss one interpretation which might possibly occur to certain minds. It might occur to some that this reserve of Jesus was only the superior silence of indifference. It might seem that Jesus spoke little about death because He scorned the very thought of death. But if we take the Gospels, and study the story of the Master there, that supposition becomes untenable. When we are silent on a matter, it does not necessarily mean we are indifferent. Sometimes the subject of which the heart is fullest is that on which the lips are strangely still. Now think of Jesus at the grave of Lazarus, when He was face to face with death. Look at Him—what is that upon His cheek?—it is the dewy glistening of tears. And then a bend of the road reveals the sepulchre, and there is death, in ravage and in victory, and Jesus groans in spirit and is troubled. Whatever else that means, there is one thing that it emphatically means. It means that Jesus, indifferent to so much, was not indifferent to the final tragedy. He shared in the anguish of the orphaned heart. Whatever His silence, it was not the silence of a serene and philosophic scorn.

(2) Dismissing that, then, we may advance a little if we remember Jesus' favourite name for death. The familiar name of Christ for death was *sleep*. Entering the darkened home of Jairus, He said, 'The maiden is not dead, but sleepeth.' Learning the news that Lazarus was gone. He said at once, 'Our friend Lazarus sleepeth.' And these expressions, springing from the heart, and of an authenticity that none can question, tell us that Jesus spoke of death as sleep.

The Jews were far more poetical than we are, and they loved metaphor and all poetic imagery, and they were perfectly familiar from their literature with the figure of death as the last sleep. Yet when Jesus stood beside the dead, and said what all of us have said, 'She sleepeth,' somehow they utterly misunderstood Him, and heaped on Him the insult of derision. Others had come to Jairus's house that morning and had said gently, 'How

peacefully she sleeps.' And the father and mother had understood at once that kindly sympathy. Then came Christ, and said, *She is not dead—I tell you she is not dead, but sleeping*—and Him they laughed to scorn. That scorn is utterly inexplicable if Christ was speaking in poetic metaphor. There must have been something in His eye and tone that challenged the plainest evidence of sense. They felt instinctively that in the mind of Christ their little daughter was not dead, but living, although her eyes were closed, and there was not a quiver of breath upon her lips. In other words, this was not death to Christ, and every hearer felt He meant it so.

¶ Death itself had no terrors for Jowett—and the tomb no victory. 'Death,' he said, 'is but a change of clothes, not a change of character. It is just a brief transition. It is a mere changing of the sites, a plucking up of the tent pegs on the plains of earth and a shifting of one's quarters to the heavenly fields.' [1]

3. We are led, then, to the conviction that this was not what Jesus meant by death at all. In the habitual thought of that supreme intelligence, death was something darker and more terrible. It was not death to Him when the strong men bowed themselves, and when the daughters of music were brought low. All that was life, though it was life asleep, in the mighty arms of the eternal God; death was something more terrible than that. The maiden is not dead, but sleepeth; but—this my son was dead and is alive again. The maiden is not dead, but sleepeth; but—he who believeth upon Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. Christ did not find the dead in Jairus's house, or in any sepulchre among the Galilean hills. He saw the dead where men and women were—in the synagogue and in the market and the home.

¶ In the powerful story of a great French novelist, a man, who has made up his mind to do a terrible wrong, falls asleep and dreams. He fancies that he is visiting a beautiful village close to Paris, 'where lovers go to pick lilacs in April.' But now all the landscape is flowerless and ashen, and the sky overhead is of a leaden hue. An ominous silence broods over the place. The traveller walks through the streets and enters the houses, and he finds all the people standing silent; he questions them, but they answer not a word. In horror he flees, and the silent ones move after him, till at last on the dreary plain beneath that lowering heaven they salute him with a cry—'Do you not know that you have been dead a long while?' Yes, 'to be carnally-minded is death.' The man who loses touch with God who is his life destroys himself. He shrivels and pines and dwindles; becomes a ghost, a phantasm, the mere spectre of a man. And nothing remains but an emptiness and a terror and a mocking procession of unrealities that cry, 'Do you not know that you have been dead a long while?' [1]

If half the anguish of the open grave were felt for those who are living useless lives, if half the tears that fall upon the coffin fell upon hearts that are frivolous or obdurate, not only would we be nearer Christ in His deepest thought about humanity, but we should know more than we have ever known of the joy that cometh in the morning. For love and faith and prayer are powerless to bring again the dear one who is lost. But 'this my son was dead and is alive again'—and there is music and dancing in the home to-night.

PRUDENCE

Luke xvi. 1-8.—'And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. . . . And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.'

We are startled at first reading of this parable to find our Lord, as we suppose, commending a dishonest man—'And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.' This, however, arises from an ambiguity in the English. It is the steward's own master who

[1] A. Porritt, *J. H. Jowett*, 150.

[1] F. H. Dudden, *Christ and Christ's Religion*, 100.

commends him, not our Lord Jesus, and it would have been well had this been brought out clearly in the translation. His master would say of him, with a rueful smile, 'What a clever rogue he is! You won't catch him napping, he is so shrewd he will contrive to land on his feet every time.'

Now the master, in expressing this reluctant admiration, was simply commenting upon the single point of the man's prudence, without taking into account at the moment his bad qualities. We all are accustomed to speak after this fashion in everyday life. We often isolate a single quality of a man's character and comment upon it, by way either of praise or of blame, without taking his other qualities into account. We might, for example, admire the skill of the burglar who had broken into our house, and say what a clever fellow he must have been. We might entertain the highest opinion of the business ability of a man whose moral character we condemned. It was thus that our Lord spoke of the prudence of the steward in this parable, holding it up as an example. 'He fastened on a single point, excluding all other considerations. The man had planned, he had seen difficulties, overcome them, marked out his path, held to it steadily, crowned himself with success. So far he is an example. The way in which he used his power of forecasting may have been bad; but forecast itself is good.'

Of course, on a wider view and if his whole character and conduct be taken into account, the unjust steward with all his shrewdness was a fool. Our Lord makes this plain in His parable of the Rich Fool, which ought to be read as a supplement to this parable. There you have a man who had all the prudence and foresight of the unjust steward, and besides he was honest. By his own industry he had laid up a sufficient store of good things to last a lifetime, but when all was done the verdict of God was, 'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.' The unjust steward would have come under the same condemnation, but meantime our Lord, judging his action for the moment from the worldly point of view, commends his prudence and holds it up as an example. 'The children of this world,' He says, 'are in their generation wiser than the children of light.' They leave no stone unturned to make their earthly future secure. They pursue their worldly aims wholeheartedly. And so they may well put to shame the disciple who, believing in the supreme reality of the world to come, makes no provision for it, or only half-heartedly pursues his heavenly aim.

There are lessons to be learnt from the actions of the bad as well as the good, the sinner may in some respect be a model as well as the saint. This is what Browning brings out so dramatically in *The Statue and the Bust*. The Duke and the Lady had set their hearts upon a sin but spent their days in idle hankering. What their ultimate fate may be the poet cannot tell,

Only they see not God, I know,
Nor all that chivalry of His,
The soldier-saints who, row on row,

Burn upward each to his point of bliss—
Since, the end of life being manifest,
He had burned his way thro' the world to this.

And if the objection be made that the end in view was a crime, the poet's answer is, 'Assuming them to have chosen that end, they should have striven for it with all their might.'

Stake your counter as boldly every whit,
Venture as warily, use the same skill,
Do your best, whether winning or losing it,

If you choose to play!—is my principle.
Let a man contend to the uttermost
For his life's set prize, be it what it will!

The counter our lovers staked was lost
As surely as if it were lawful coin:
And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost

Is—the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin,
Though the end in sight was a vice, I say.
You of the virtue (we issue join)
How strive you? *De te, fabula*!

I

A CARDINAL VIRTUE

The ancient Greeks enumerated four cardinal virtues, namely, Temperance, Prudence, Justice and Fortitude, and these have been taken over into Christian ethics as indicating the indis-

pensable foundations of moral character. Our concern, meantime, is with Prudence. Milton defines Prudence as 'that virtue by which we discern what is proper to be done under the various circumstances of time and place.' The word is compounded of two Latin words meaning to see before, and expresses the quality of looking ahead so as to be ready for what is coming. It is the same word as Providence. When God looks ahead and makes timely provision for the wants of His creatures we call that Providence; when a man acts wisely with an eye to the future we call that Prudence. The man who lacks this quality we call imprudent or improvident.

Prudence has often been misunderstood, belittled and despised. There are some virtues so easily perverted, either by exaggeration or by neglect of their character and office, that it may become difficult to distinguish them from vices. Prudence is a virtue of this sort. Some moralists have treated it as having no place in Christian ethics, alleging that it frequently hinders the special virtues men should most desire to attain. To these critics it stands for a cool self-regard, persistence in securing one's own welfare, careful restriction of a man's activities to what is safe, tempting him to selfish withdrawal from the great ventures of faith. Thus R. L. Stevenson writes, 'As soon as Prudence has begun to grow up in the brain, like a dismal fungus, it finds expression in a paralysis of generous acts.'[1] Much to the same effect, though with a significant qualification, is the verdict of Dr Parker: 'Prudence (in its ordinary but most inadequate sense) has done very little for the world except to tease and hinder many of its masters and sovereigns; it would have kept back every mariner from the deep, and deterred every traveller from the desert—it would have put out the fires of science, and clipped the wings of poetry—it would have kept Abram at home, and found Moses a comfortable settlement in Egypt. Beware of imprudent prudence; it will lull you to sleep, and bring you to a nameless and worthless end.'

The substance of these criticisms is that Prudence is essentially selfish and cowardly. But it need not be so. The prudent man has often the welfare of others chiefly at heart, as for example, when, the prudent father makes provision for his family, or the prudent statesman foresees and plans for the good of his country. If it be true that 'more harm is wrought by want of thought than wrought by want of heart,' then forethought or Prudence may avert much harm and greatly contribute to the public good. Nor, again, is Prudence necessarily timid and cowardly. We all admire dash and courage, that dauntless spirit which carries a man forward on a great adventure regardless of consequences. Luther is the hero of the Reformation, not the timid Erasmus. But, after all, the highest courage is not blind and reckless. It is the courage of the man who has foreseen the danger and has counted the cost, and who yet ventures. Any virtue carried to excess becomes a vice, and Prudence also, when carried to excess, may induce timidity and a paralysis of action. But Prudence is not the prosaic virtue of the cautious and timid, of those whom Dante saw outside the limits of hell, not daring enough to sin, not adventurous enough for deeds of virtue, 'men who lived without infamy and without praise';[1] but it is a virtue which reaches right up into the highest regions of intellectual and spiritual action.

When all is said, Prudence is entitled to its place as one of the cardinal virtues. It is essential to the right ordering of human life. All experience goes to prove that the improvident man is among the most helpless and hopeless of God's creatures. Parkman, the Canadian historian, speaks of the improvidence of the Alonquin Indian who, 'in the hour of plenty, forgets the season of want,' until, 'stiff and stark, with haggard cheek and shrivelled lip, he lies among the snowdrifts; till, with tooth and claw the famished wild cat strives in vain to pierce the frigid marble of his limbs.'[2] Alas, in every nation there are to be found those who, with incredible folly and want of forethought, enjoy what fortune sends to-day without a thought of to-morrow. To go through life in a spirit of that sort is to invite disaster, for there is little chance, in a complex world like this, for the man who hopes simply to blunder on his way, with no conception of whither he is going, and no foresight of the obstacles and perils he may meet.

The prudent man is he who realizes this,

[1] *Aes Triplex.*

[1] *Inferno*, iii. 35.
[2] *Conspiracy of Pontiac.*

who looks ahead and lays his plans as did the steward in the parable. It is a Divine gift this power to foresee and provide. By it a man may become godlike, a kind of Providence in a small way to those dependent on him. Sir James Yoxall writes with charm and wisdom about Crusoe building his tent on the island. 'It is all a symbol. "*Into this tent I brought everything*"—the best of ways to make a home. Children have come into Pater's tent, which is what none did into Crusoe's; but then, Pater brought Mater into it, rash wise fellow! "*I piled the empty chests and casks up in a circle round the tent, to fortify it*"; as children come in from the infinite, one after another, Pater must fortify the home more and more. He must take out life assurance policies, and save money in order to have some ready at the bank in Mater's name in case an accident should befall him; then he can feel less anxious about the danger of sudden attacks. Perhaps all this is what we are here for—to overcome shipwreck, circumvent starvation, build a house and fortify it, protect the weak and quell the brutal, as Crusoe did, and presently, in the fullness of time, be taken off by a ship! Perhaps death itself is a sailing away, upon "that immortal sea which brought us hither," towards horizons "fast by our native shore."'[1]

II

THE HIGHER PRUDENCE

This leads on to the thought that the truly prudent man will look forward till at last his eyes are sweeping the horizon of eternity. He will make provision not only for an earthly but for a heavenly future. 'There are two kinds of Prudence,' said St Basil, 'a Prudence of the flesh, and a Prudence of the spirit.' The unjust steward cultivated the first in an eminent degree, and by His example our Lord would stir up His disciples to cultivate the second. The quality of character required is the same in both cases, only the aim is different. He who cannot be induced to look six months ahead will not easily be persuaded to look ahead to another world, whereas he who has learnt the value of worldly Prudence may be taught thereby to value and practise the higher Prudence in regard to things eternal.

[1] *Live and Learn*, 155 f.

This is the lesson that our Lord would impress upon His disciples, that Prudence counsels us to give timely heed to our soul's eternal well-being. Recall Milton's definition: 'Prudence is that virtue by which we discern what is proper to be done under the various circumstances of time and place.' Now, what are our 'circumstances of time and place'? Briefly, that 'here we have no continuing city,' that no matter how we may prosper or how much we may gain of this world's goods we must very soon be parted from it all. It is told of Philip Neri that he went to visit a young friend in Rome who, he feared, was turning to a worldly career. He gently questioned him as to his immediate aim, and, when that was disclosed, he said, 'After that, what then?' When some higher ambition was mentioned the question was repeated, 'And then?' So it continued till the highest positions in Church and State were spoken of as within the bounds of the young man's hope, when once more the question was pressed, 'And then?' Thus was he brought at last by his wise questioner to look over the summit of the world's greatness and come face to face with eternity.

It will be well for all of us to recognize that this is our position too. The day cannot be far distant when for each of us this world will have passed away and the lusts thereof. What are we going to do about it? Prudence counsels that timely provision should be made, and it is unpardonable folly to disregard that heavenly voice. The story is perhaps familiar of the king who gave his jester a staff to be given to a bigger fool, if ever he should meet one. Soon after, the king lay dying, and the jester came to visit him. In answer to his simple questions the king confessed that he was going to an unknown country, from which he would never more return, that he knew not the way and had made no provision for his journey. Then the jester laid the staff on the bed, bidding the king keep it, for he had found in him a greater fool than himself. This is precisely the folly that is deplored and denounced in the Old Testament. The fool is the man who has said in his heart, there is no God, who has left the eternal world altogether out of his reckoning. No matter how learned or clever he may be, how shrewd or prosperous or well versed in the affairs of this world, before God he is a fool.

Prudence has not justified its name till it has led us to take the long view, and to make provision for the life which is to come. 'Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not'—that is prudence. 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness'—that is prudence. To believe in Christ's revelation of the life beyond, and to live as though it were true, to be ready when the Master calls—that is prudence.

¶ 'It was an awful night in Scotland. The snow was deep; the wind simply shrieked around the little hut in which a good old elder lay dying. His daughter brought the family Bible to his bedside.

'"Father," she said, "will I read a chapter to ye?"

'But the old man was in sore pain, and only moaned. She opened the book.

'"Na, na, lassie," he said, "the storm's up noo; I thackit my hoose in the calm weather."'[1]

It was beautifully reminiscent of the Sermon on the Mount. 'Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house; and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock.'

III

THE CULTURE OF PRUDENCE

Prudence, like every other virtue, needs to be cultivated, and the higher Prudence especially is a rare plant, and requires heavenly nourishment for its growth. For to the world the higher Prudence appears as folly, and faith a mad venture. We shall ever and anon be met by those who deny the reality of things eternal, who are ready to tell us as Atheist told the pilgrims with ribbald laughter, 'There is no such place as you dream of in all the world.'[2] St Paul freely admits that unless the eternal is the real the whole Christian faith is madness and folly. 'If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable' (1 Cor. xv. 19). But he has assurance of the reality. Christ by His resurrection has given that assurance beyond dispute. 'Now is Christ risen from the dead,' thereby confirming for ever His word of truth. Unless you are prepared to stand up to the fourteenth chapter of John and say it is all lies, unless you are ready to renounce every hope of the Father's house of many mansions, it is all most real, and infinitely worthy to be striven for.

Here, then, is where Faith and Prudence meet and are found to be at one. Faith, making its great leap in the dark, seems to join hands with folly, and cast Prudence quite away. But faith, finding a sure foothold on the unseen Rock of Ages, is proved to have wisdom on its side. Just because, out there in the unseen, there is reality the higher Prudence urges faith to make the leap. It is cowardice and folly that would hold back. George Borrow tells how, in crossing the mountains in Spain, he was met by two peasants, one of whom shouted, 'Cavalier, turn back; in a moment you will be amongst precipices where your horses will break their necks.' The other cried, 'Cavalier, proceed, but be careful, and your horses, if sure-footed, will run no great danger; my comrade is a fool.'[1]

It is indeed the voice of folly that bids the pilgrim of faith turn back, prudence as well as courage bids him in God's name, 'Proceed.' 'The cavalier will know that at the extreme point of culture the generosity of the heart and the prudence of the enlightened mind are one. . . . There is a point, far above the plane on which most of us spend our lives, where the finer spirits, idealist or realist, meet and are at one. There the perfectly prudent man and the rash plunger into unknown dominions salute each other, since both are animated by the same motive and pursue the same goal.'[2]

This assured conviction of the reality of things eternal, which inspires faith to make its venture and to pursue its way in peace, is to be cultivated by a daily living in contact with the unseen. So it was with Moses, who chose the reproach of Christ rather than the treasures of Egypt, 'for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.' So it was with Paul, who made light of all toil and suffering, while he looked 'not at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.'

[1] F. W. Boreham, *The Luggage of Life*, 50.
[2] *Pilgrim's Progress*, pt. i.

[1] *Letters to the Bible Society*, 233.
[2] A. C. Hill, *The Sword of the Lord*, 129.

So must it be with us. And to this very end are all the means of grace appointed. The peace of the Sabbath, the sanctity of God's house, the hour of prayer, the holy book with all its gracious invitations and solemn warnings, its precious promises and blessed visions, all are divinely ordained, and to be used to this end, that the world of time and sense may be made to shrink to its true proportions, and the unseen become more real and dominant in our lives that we may attain to an invincible conviction of the truth of our Lord's words when He said, 'What shall it profit a man though he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'

J. H. Morrison.

The Stewardship of Life

Luke xvi. 2.—'Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.'

We are all of us stewards. Properly speaking there is no such thing as true human ownership. All that we hold, we hold on trust. We have inherited some things it may be, and earned some things by work or by skill, but even these are not ours in one sense; for whatever we have comes from the cultivation, in ourselves or in others, of the gifts of God. Our life is a gift, our powers are gifts, our capacities are gifts. This truth is a most elementary one, yet quickly forgotten. We so easily get into the way of treating things and relationships as indefeasible rights, as reflecting lustre upon ourselves, that it is good from time to time to bring ourselves face to face with the reality that we did not confer these things on ourselves, that God gave them to us; and further, that we shall have to answer for them, that sooner or later, as regards all we have to use here—time, money, mental gifts, social gifts all alike—there will be the same demand. 'Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward.'

¶ The record of George Müller's long life of service and devotion may be summed up in the one word: 'Stewardship.' For God he received; for God he spent. In his old age he stood for that principle as earnestly as when in his youth he said: 'The child of God has been bought with the precious blood of Christ, and is altogether His property, with all that he possesses: his bodily strength, his mental strength, his ability of every kind, his trade, business, art, profession, property.' And he still stood, regarding the systematizing of giving, where he did when he declared, likewise: 'If it be asked: "How much shall I give of my income—the tenth part, or the fifth, or the third, or a half?" my reply is: "God lays down no rule concerning this point. What we do we should do cheerfully and not of necessity. But if even Jacob, with the first dawning of spiritual light, promised to God the tenth of all He should give to him, how much ought we believers in the Lord Jesus to do for Him?—we, whose calling is a heavenly one, and who know distinctly that we are children of God and joint-heirs with the Lord Jesus."'[1]

We are, then, trustees, stewards of the gifts of God, responsible every day to Him for the way in which we use them, responsible to Him ultimately for the whole effect on ourselves and others which our stewardship has produced. In what direction does the danger lie? Surely the peril is lest we waste what we have.

1. First of all, there is waste of *mental ability*, whether it be of a higher or of a lower kind, be it talent, sagacity, insight or memory; these mental powers which we have are God's gifts to us. To let them lie idle in children, to refuse to educate any child in early years is a thing condemned by public opinion, by the conscience of the community. We do sometimes, perhaps, speak to children about the waste of their mental gifts and the neglect of those golden and for ever irrecoverable opportunities which youth presents. But how easily we ourselves learn to acquiesce later on in what is really a throwing away of all the results of our own education.

Suppose a man to have been educated, *i.e.*, to have been put upon a platform on which he is able to discover the nature of his God-given talent, is there not a real danger—unless the need to work for bread comes in—that he should content himself with knowing that, if he chose to work at this or that, he could succeed in it, and should never go on to think, I must cultivate that gift because God has given it to me, I must work at it diligently, because I am His steward.

[1] W. H. Harding, *The Life of George Müller*, 343.

¶ A garden is planted, let us say, with strawberries and roses, and for a number of years is left alone. In process of time it will run to waste. But this does not mean that the plants will really waste away, but that they will change into something else, and, as it invariably appears, into something worse; in the one case into the small wild strawberry of the woods, and in the other into the primitive dog-rose of the hedges. . . . Now, the same thing exactly happens in the case of man. Why should man be an exception to any of the laws of nature? If we neglect the ordinary means of keeping a garden in order, how shall it escape running to weeds and waste? or if we neglect the opportunities for cultivating the mind, how shall it escape ignorance and feebleness? So if we neglect the soul, how shall it escape the inevitable relapse into barrenness and death? [1]

2. Or again, look at the waste of *social gifts* around us. These are intended for great ends. Two things strike us especially to-day: on the one hand, the immense power of social gifts where men and women use them unselfishly—the power of elevation and attraction which they possess; and, on the other, the exceeding rareness of any serious attempt to make use of them on the part of their possessors.

The power of influence which belongs to social gifts is enormous — the waste of it is terrible. Indolence, timidity, thinking of popularity more than of usefulness, are the enemies with which we all have to contend. It is piteous beyond words to hear people complaining that their lives are empty, merely because they have not got what they think that they want, when all the time there is in them a power of sympathy, dulled, it is true, by selfishness, present but yet dormant; and a great cry for that sympathy is rising up from every side. Nothing is more certain than the good which we may do by unselfish exertion, by sharing our social advantages; by remembering that tie of human brotherhood which it is often so hard to recognize, but which is the one thing that lasts when all other distinctions have faded away.

¶ Turgueniev in his *Poems in Prose* tells how he met a beggar one day who asked him for alms. 'I felt in all my pockets. No purse, watch, or handkerchief did I find. I had left them all at home. The beggar waited, and his outstretched hand twitched and trembled slightly. Embarrassed and confused, I seized his dirty hand and pressed it: "Don't be vexed with me, brother: I have nothing with me." The beggar raised his bloodshot eyes to mine, his blue lips smiled, and he returned the pressure of my chilled fingers. "Never mind, brother," he stammered; "thank you for this. This, too, was a gift." I felt that I also had received a gift from my brother.'

[1] Henry Drummond.

3. Or again, there is the *waste of money*, a thing which it is perhaps easier to think about than the waste of mental gifts or social influence, because money is a more tangible thing than talent or social gifts.

One way of wasting money is gambling. It has defiled many of our sports; it has caused irreparable ruin and distress in thousands of homes; its growth at the present time is tending to lessen the appetite for honest work. In wider ways, too, the gambling spirit which has pervaded the commercial world is causing suffering and distress to thousands of innocent people, who have put their faith in great names, and have believed in specious prospectuses. In short, the gambler, wherever he goes, brings ruin and misery. The rich man who persuades others to play for sums which they cannot afford to lose is a social pest of the worst kind; he drags after him numbers of imitators of whom he has never heard.

But money may be wasted in other ways, and wasted just as surely. The man who spends all that he has always upon himself, however decorously and prudently, wastes what he has. The man who hoards what he has, as if money had some virtue inherent in itself, and could be kept by its owner for ever, wastes what he has. The man who does not make a conscience of consecrating what he has by giving some fixed proportion of it to God, and to his fellow-creatures, wastes what he has. He wastes it for this reason—that, whatever he does with it, he does not treat it seriously as God's property, lent to him for a certain time, to be used by him for God's glory, to be accounted for by him one day at the foot of Christ's throne.

¶ Of Sir Thomas Sutton it is said that his

constant prayer, which he was heard to repeat as he walked up and down his garden, was, 'Lord, Thou hast given me a large and liberal estate, give me also a heart to make the right use of it.' And the prayer was heard, and the heart to use aright his wealth was given, as the existence of the Charterhouse to this day declares.[1]

Accounts Rendered

Luke xvi. 5.—'How much owest thou?'

'How much owest thou unto my lord?' Let us pick out this simple sentence and, for the moment, forget its setting. What does it amount to? Why—someone says, speaking for someone else, that someone owes his master something. It is a demand-note, it is a bill-head; it is a notice to pay, with an alternative notice to quit; it is the language of the tax-collector. Yet stay, there is another alternative: it may be a Christian preacher who puts the question; and perhaps when he says Lord he means not landlord, not tax-collector, but just Lover. So we must stop and listen to his tale of our obligations.

1. Look at John the Baptist, for instance, rough child of the desert, brought up outside social conventions, a companion of wild beasts, and in many respects not unlike them: how will he be able to turn accountant and present an intelligible bill of duties—that is to say, of things due? The Baptist is not at a loss. To one inquirer he says, 'You owe my Lord a coat.' To another, 'You possess superfluous meat, due elsewhere than to your own anatomy.' To another, 'You owe a spell of road-making, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near at hand.' To another, 'Your orchard-produce is in demand—fruits answerable to amendment of life. Can you let me have them?' To another, 'You must restore what you took violently away.' Then, suppose we object that all these are duties to men, and that at least he should have written out the claim under another bill-head, headed not *Dr* to Man, but *Dr* to the Holy and Undivided Trinity. But the Baptist declares that it is one and the same firm; and he goes on making out more and longer bills—*Dr* to Mr Poor-man, *Dr* to Mr Weak-man, *Dr* to Mr Lonely-man, *Dr* to Mrs Widow and young Miss Orphan. Assuredly John the Baptist is a shrewd accountant, and he refuses to be paid off with any drafts upon our defunct ancestors. Think not to say, 'We can refer you to Abraham to settle our dues for us.' The Lord will accept no such out-worn currency as traditional or ritual religion can offer.

2. Here, however, is another and a gentler soul, a Christian teacher, also John by name, who associates himself with us in debts jointly contracted. 'We owe it,' says he. What is it, then? He says, 'We owe it to lay down our lives for the brethren.' He means, 'I am doing it; but are you doing it too, or are you only a sleeping partner in the company of faithful souls, only a nominal force in the alliance of heaven?' He asks again, 'Are we loving our brother, whom we have seen, or only telling him about the God whom we have not seen?' Thus it appears that both these Johns, the Baptist and the Evangelist, make out their bills in the form *Dr* to Man, with the legend at the top, 'How much owest thou to my Lord?' Only, with the second John the currency has somewhat changed, the coins are new, the money is cruciform: 'He laid down His life for us, and we owe it to lay down our lives for the brethren.' How much do we owe in the same currency of love and sacrifice?

3. Now let us make out these bills again, and under their proper head-line. The Apostle Paul's question as to what thou owest is accompanied by another question as to what thou hast received. He uses the shining word 'grace' along with the dark word 'debt,' and he would have us realize that the one is medicine for the other. So, for Paul, the redeemed man is a debtor to covenant grace; he is bankrupt and yet abounding. Show him that you have a big file of obligations which you never have met and never can, he slips on to the file another little paper inscribed with the words, 'Where sin abounded, grace doth much more abound.' It is easy for him to pay off a shilling, because his Lord has given him a sovereign to pay it with; and he calls this sovereign by the name of 'plenteous grace.' Thus for Paul the final

[1] W. Houghton.

debt is not the shilling but the sovereign; the debt is ultimately the grace.

O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be.

4. Now, once more, let us watch the Christian preacher—who is also the debt-collector—and pull out of his pockets some of the bills.

(1) Here is one that is very common; we may call it *a praise-bill.* It is very hard to collect: for when people are badly off, they say they cannot pay it; and when they are well off, they hardly ever think of paying it. The tribute of praise is hard to gather, yet the Lord desires it and demands it. Amid the adoration of angels and archangels He says, 'I miss my little human praise'; and whenever it rises up, it makes His heart glad.

When some Christian exclaims, 'O magnify the Lord with me!' or, talking to himself, says, 'Bless the Lord, O my soul,' that makes our Lord glad. He loves to hear the new song practised by those in whose mouths He has put it—a new song, even praise to our God. But especially He loves to see people diligently counting their blessings, when it seems as if there were very few to count.

¶ You remember Borrow's gipsy: 'Life is sweet, brother!' 'Do you think so! There's night and day, brother, both sweet things; sun, moon, and stars, brother, all sweet things; there's likewise the wind on the heath. Life is very sweet, brother.' 'In sickness, Jasper?' 'There's the sun and stars, brother!' 'In blindness, Jasper?' 'There's the wind on the heath, brother.'[1]

And when a man is so intent on God's praise that he can make its music out of broken strings and with a theme of blasted fig-trees and fruitless olive-trees and desolate ox-stalls, then there is silence in heaven to hear it.

¶ When on his way home from China Hudson Taylor had a serious fall on the boat. After he had been in London for a week or two the constant travelling increased his pain, and gradually he became partially paralysed and was confined to his bed. Stricken down in the prime of his days, he could only lie in that upstairs room conscious of all there was to be done, of all that was not being attended to—lie there and rejoice in God.

Yes, rejoice in God! With desires and hopes as limitless as the needs that pressed upon his heart; with the prayer he had prayed, and the answers God had given; with opportunities opening in China, and a wave of spiritual blessing reviving the churches at home that he longed to see turned into missionary channels; with the 'sentence of death' in himself, and only the faintest hope that he would ever stand or walk again, the deepest thing of all was that unquestioning acceptance of the will of God, as wise, as kind, as best. Certain it is that from that quiet room, that room of suffering, sprang all the larger growth of the China Inland Mission.[1]

(2) Here is another bill—*the claim for the surrender and service and love of the whole heart.* Have we paid our love-bills? Its entry is, 'One whole heart, as per contract.' It was made out first in Moses' name, written very legibly, too, on a stone tablet; but Moses never was able to collect it. Then, after awhile, Jesus Christ came, and picked up the bits of broken legislation. He put them together again, and called this man and that man to Him, saying, 'What is written in the law? How readest thou?' Then, when the command had been read over, 'With all thy heart, and all thy strength, and all thy mind,' some fell to praying, and began to say, 'O Lord, let that become possible to us by Thy grace, which by nature is impossible to us.' While others set the same prayer to music and sang, 'Take my life, and let it be. . . . Not a mite would I withhold. . . . Always, only, for my King. . . . Ever, only, all for Thee.' And so the love-bill was paid after all—a little in cash, and the rest in a deferred annuity for which eternity promises to be too short.[2]

[1] *Lavengro*, 164.

Learning from the World

Luke xvi. 8.—'The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.'

THE steward of the parable is not an admirable character. He is fraudulent to the very heart of him. He is as undependable as a rotten branch. And yet in all his falsities how nimbly and energetically he uses his faculties and powers! He concentrates all the forces of his will in the effort to save himself from disaster.

[1] *Hudson Taylor*, 264.
[2] J. Rendel Harris, *As Pants the Hart*, 160.

Our Lord looks at this son of darkness—so clever, so keen-witted, so alert, so purposeful, so enterprising. And then He turns His gaze away from the worldly man to the religious man, and seems to say, 'How do *you* fare in comparison with the children of the world? Where is your foresight? How many faculties, and how much strenuousness are you investing in the service of your Lord?' . . . And when our Master had looked upon the one, and then upon the other, He quietly uttered this most tremendous judgment—'The children of this world look further ahead in their generation than the children of light.'

What is the significance of this teaching of our Lord? Our Lord is greatly surprised that those who make religious professions do not put as much into their sacred business as other men put into the fraudulent business of the world. And the suggestion of the teaching is this—that He expects us to be as keen, as clever, as ingenious, and as creative in the cause of the Kingdom of God as other men are in the evil service of Mammon. He wants us to be as expert and as sharp-witted in winning souls as others are in winning worldly gains and favours. He wants us to be as open-eyed and ready in extending the frontiers of His Kingdom as vigilant empire-builders are in broadening the boundaries of a State.

Now let us see how this would work out. We are to bring into our religious life all the faculties which the steward used in his clever life of disloyalty and sin. What, then, were these faculties? May we not say that he used his reason, that he used his imagination, and that he used his ingenuity? He used them all with courage and decision.

1. First of all we are to use our *reason*. In seeking to enrich our religious life we are deliberately to think about things. There is a very famous sentence of Matthew Arnold's in which he counsels us 'to think clear, feel deep, and bear fruit well.' Let us take the first part of the counsel, which Matthew Arnold evidently regards as the spring and secret of all the rest, and let us think as clearly as we may about God, and the character of God, and the will of God, and the things of God. Let us sit down to the business, and let us give time and quietness to it. In the book of the prophet Isaiah, God speaks in this wise—'My thoughts are not your thoughts.' Well, by the aid and counsel of the Holy Spirit, let us reverently seek to think ourselves into His way of thinking, and fill our minds with the divine aspect of things. By assiduous thinking we can alter our thinking, and by changing our thinking we can transform our lives. 'Be ye transformed,' says the Word of God, 'by the renewal of your mind.'

¶ Said Dr Jowett, 'I was in a cloth factory once where they were weaving the broad West of England cloth. The factory was turning out different qualities of cloth, and I was deeply interested in the dissimilarities in the raw material, and in the varying qualities of the threads as they entered the looms. Even an amateur could feel the difference as he handled the raw material, and he could detect grades of refinement in the values of the threads. Change the raw material and you transform the fabric.'

In our thinking about God let us put in better stuff. Let us change our raw material. We don't think in a great way of God, and therefore our lives do not become great. . . . This false steward set about thinking, and thinking hard, and in this matter of thinking the children of the world are often in their generation wiser than the children of light.

2. But this man not only used his powers of reasoning about things, he also used his power of *imagination*. He pictured himself in the homes of his devoted friends after he had been cast out of the estate. His faculty of realization was enlisted in the service of his plans, and imagination added fuel to his enthusiasm. And we, too, are to use our imagination in seeking the highest interest and welfare of our souls, and the religious welfare of mankind. We can use it in apprehending the reality of things as they are, or we can use it in apprehending the reality of things as they might be. For example, take this little phrase from the autobiography of the Apostle Paul. He says he was 'in cold oft.' We can skim the word in ordinary thinking, and we shall no more realize its content than a swallow, dipping its wings in a lake, realizes the depths beneath. We have to set our imagination to work. We have to climb the long road from the Cicilian plain, and toil over the Taurus mountains in the depths of winter, with a blizzard blowing, and all the time being poorly clad! That is one use of the

imagination. But there is another way in which the imagination is used to realize things as they should be. Here is a sentence which reveals to us a man who is using his imagination in this way: 'I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God.' It was a vision of things as they might be. We do not use our imagination enough, and in this matter the children of the world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.

3. This man used his *ingenuity* to the full. Everybody knew that the steward was thoroughly wide awake, and that they had to be up early if they wished to take him in. And it was this wide-awakeness that Jesus laid hold of, this inventiveness, this subtle cleverness in devising novel ways of accomplishing his ends.

Surely, our Master suggests, of all people the children of light ought to be the most mentally fertile, the most prolific in devices, using all their wits to serve and glorify their Lord.

¶ Sir Arthur Keith, speaking at the Royal Institution, made the statement that not one person in fifty of the present generation uses his brain to more than one-half its capacity. That is an amazing indictment, and if it be true with regard to our ordinary everyday life it is equally so with regard to our religious life.

¶ In the spring of 1897 Commissioner Railton spent several weeks in Italy. Brigadier Pagliéri, who accompanied him as his translator, gives us his recollections of the tour and of Railton's methods of work. 'I watched his work,' he says, 'first among those who were largely Protestant, and then among the Catholics. Never did I meet any Soldier of the Cross who understood so perfectly how to adapt himself to such opposite conceptions of a religious life. One almost wondered whether he were the same person. Not only his ideals, his language, the illustrations he used, were entirely different, but his very life in all its manifestations seemed to undergo a radical transformation. . . . I delighted in his war-like ardour, in his flaming words, his courage under all trials, his tireless activity, but I was incapable of appreciating what I see now to have been by far the most wonderful side of his character, namely, his extraordinary spirit of adaptation. He certainly lived out in his life the words of St Paul, "I am all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the Gospel's sake."'[1]

¶ 'Have you ever noticed,' asks A. D. Belden,[2] 'how Frances Ridley Havergal, in her famous hymn, follows up the couplet relating to money with the consecration of the intellect?'

Take my silver and my gold,
Not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect and use
Every power as Thou shalt choose.

In the exalted cause of the Lord, and in His holy name, let us also consecrate our reason, our imagination, and our ingenuity, and let us dedicate ourselves to the service with quenchless courage and decision.

Making Friends

Luke xvi. 9.—'Make to yourselves friends.'

1. 'Friendship or death,' says an old Jewish proverb. The life that is without friendship is a barren solitude. Such a life sterilizes the emotional side of man and impairs and tends to destroy his judgment. Aristotle emphasizes the need of friendship in the form of society amongst men, and declares that 'he that is incapable of sharing in the social life and is so self-sufficing as not to need it . . . is either a beast or a god.' Bacon justly criticizes this statement in his essay on Friendship, and asserts that it would have been hard 'for the writer to put more truth and untruth together in a few words.' However true it may be regarding a beast, it is wholly untrue of the Divine nature. Incapacity for friendship does not bring one nearer God, but rather forms an absolute disqualification for goodness in any form. Only in the measure in which we have made some goodness our own are we fitted to win friendship and, what is more, to preserve it. Friendship is not to be confounded with love. A man may love those who love him not. 'I did not ask you to like them,' said Lady Kinnaird, to her daughter, 'for you cannot like people at will, but you can love them.' Friendship, on the other hand, demands reciprocity; for friendship is, as the ancient Greek philosopher Pythagoras said, 'one soul in two bodies.'

[1] *Commissioner Railton*, 134.
[2] *God's Better Thing*, 78.

All true friends—and to the number of such friends no limit can be set save through our own limitations—all true friends are dwelling places for our souls, alike when the sky is bright, and when it is surcharged with darkness and storm. Well might our greatest poet say:

The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel.

¶ How much Tennyson owed to the fine contagion of Hallam's genius we cannot know, but we do know that the influence of Hallam coloured the entire life of Tennyson. The great epoch of Tennyson's poetry began with the death of Hallam. From that hour he passed from the rank of the poets who delight us by ingenious artistry into the rank of the seers who open to us the doors of ultimate vision. The friendship of Hallam, transposed into spiritual terms, was the masterlight of all his seeing.'[1] His presence was so distinctly felt that Tennyson could write of him:

Whatever way my days decline,
I felt and feel, though left alone,
His being working in my own,
The footsteps of his life in mine.

Clement of Alexandria has preserved a beautiful saying of Jesus which is not found in our Gospels: 'The Lord did not say give, or provide, or benefit, or aid, but *make* a friend.' And friendship springs not from a single act of giving, but from unceasing kindliness and from long intercourse.

2. *Make a friend.*—It was like our Lord to say that; for He also needed friends. People who say that they can do very well without friends are not there and then exhibiting a Christian grace. Jesus, it is not too much to say, could not do without friends. Once upon a time He faced in imagination a day when, as He foresaw, He should be alone. And though He found that He could endure such a day in the pure society of God, still it promised to be a sore day and not one such as He would have chosen. Everywhere, for those who have perception in these matters, there are signs—tender, touching signs—that Jesus made friends. And there, also, He is our Lord and Master, rebuking our strident and ridiculous claims and ambitions to be self-sufficing and independent. One surely sees in Jesus a shrinking loneliness, which is the shadow and penalty of independence. He chose twelve men 'to be with him,' as the record puts it. Of those twelve, for certain reasons He chose three to be with Him still more intimately. On the night of the Transfiguration—when, we may believe, our Lord took His first long look at the Cross and tested His own resources in God—on that night the three were with Him. In reading the story of the Last Supper, also, one cannot but feel that in some way it was not for their sakes only and to fortify them that our Lord sat down to meat with His disciples; that it was for His own sake too: 'With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.' So our Lord uttered the deepest feeling of His heart. There He also confessed that it was likely to help Him through the agony which He foresaw, that He had had this hour of communion with some people who, however imperfectly they knew Him, came more nearly to Him than did the outside world. And so it was in the Garden of Gethsemane. Not that they shared His agony, not that the sweat of blood stood upon their brows; but they were there, and in some way it helped Him to know that they were there.

'Make a friend.' So Clement of Alexandria quotes Jesus. And once more the words breathe His very spirit and express the yearning, which He Himself understood, not to be alone in this world. 'Make a friend.' Count no service too exacting which gives you a friend, which secures for you that when your time comes to be alone you will not be alone.

¶ 'We take care,' wrote Emerson—and they are great and true words—'We take care of our health; we lay up our money; we make our roof tight, and our clothing sufficient; but who provides wisely that he shall not be wanting in the best property of all—friends?'

¶ Dr Johnson said to Sir Joshua Reynolds: 'If a man does not make new acquaintances as he advances through life, he will soon find himself left alone. A man, Sir, should keep his friendships in constant repair.'

3. How our Lord bore with those whose friendship He desired! What patience with their misunderstandings, with their lower point

[1] W. J. Dawson, *The Book of Courage*, 46.

of view! What faith that, if He kept on being Himself, they would one day see Him and see everything! And how it all came to pass, so that when He was taken from them they walked softly all the rest of their life. For those three hours on Calvary, indeed, He was almost alone; but it was only for those three hours. From that day until this day Jesus has been making friends. Is there a deeper thing to say about our life in this world than just this: that it is all so wonderfully contrived that it seems to have no other object than to discover to us, one by one, our need of friends on an ever-deepening level of the soul, and to discover to us our need of that final friendship of God which was the personal faith of Jesus, His gift and testimony to the world?

The Moral Use of Money

Luke xvi. 9.—'Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles' (R.V.).

It is an interesting observation, that those whose chief concern has been with God have often given much thought to the subject of wealth. It was so with two of the greatest Scotsmen of the nineteenth century. The intellectual interests of Thomas Chalmers were divided between Theology and Political Economy, and many who have not read a line of Flint's *Theism* and *Anti-Theistic Theories* have given days and nights to his exposition and criticism of Socialism. One reason, no doubt, why the subject is attractive to the theologian is that wealth is the most familiar and powerful of the rivals which dispute the claim of God to the allegiance of the human heart, and that the pursuit of wealth is accordingly the most interesting of all forms of idolatry. Another reason is that Mammon, while often fighting against God, is capable of being enlisted in the support and service of manifold causes which are embraced in the programme of the Kingdom of God.

The teaching of our Lord reflects a similar interest in the subject. Here, also, we find a recognition of the fact that there is both a good and an evil side to mammon. The parable of the Unjust Steward deals most directly with the subject, and combines the two ideas of wealth as a snare and as a talent. It begins with the reminder that all kinds of evil are mixed up with the getting and spending of money, but it goes on to teach that wealth has great possibilities as a means of grace.

1. *Money as a root of evil.*—The first thing is to notice the term by which Christ designates money. He calls it the *mammon of unrighteousness*. One might be tempted to think that the term implies a censure on the mode of obtaining the money. But there is not a trace of such an implication. The antithesis is not between money justly and money unjustly earned, but between money as such and the true riches. Mammon is not in itself indifferent, and determined only in a bad sense by the adjectival clause 'of unrighteousness.' Mammon as such is the mammon of unrighteousness. There is a snare in it, a mystery of iniquity, a spirit in it which excites madness. Virgil in a memorable line spoke of 'the accursed hunger for gold.' Deep inlaid in it is the lust of the world. It appears the simplest and most innocent of things, but let it enter the soul and obtain influence there, and it will work all imaginable ruin.[1]

For wealth fosters an egoism above the average, a pernicious habit of acting as if one's own comfort and dignity were of more importance than the relief of the real and urgent needs of others. The natural and human life of service and affection in the home and of daily labour in the service of the community prepares men and women for the definitely moral life based upon the Golden Rule and for the life of self-consecration to God's will for mankind that grows out of that. But the unnatural and inhuman life of having so much done for one's comfort and convenience, of receiving and consuming far more than one gives, while others hunger and perish from neglect, unfits the soul for the next stage of heavenward progress.[2]

¶ Watts' picture of 'Mammon' drives home with pitiless force these great and too often forgotten truths: first, that Mammon-worship results in a hideous disfigurement of the soul itself, and, next, that it imposes a hideous tyranny which robs Humanity of its most sacred rights. For this horrible figure, whose throne is decked with skulls, is the embodiment

[1] R. F. Horton, *The Commandments of Jesus*, 249.
[2] F. A. M. Spencer, *The Ethics of the Gospel*, 90.

of the soul that has made gold its god. Not a gleam of pity, or kindliness, or intelligence, or humour in this besotted and brutish countenance. The ears are the ears of Midas, emblem of asinine stupidity, of Midas whose touch, in accordance with his own request, turned everything to gold, and whose fulfilled desire was his own death-warrant. The prostrate form at his feet sums up the vileness of the slave traffic, the sweated labour of toiling millions, the countless lives sacrificed in wars of sheer aggression, the yet larger toll of life that strong drink has taken to swell Mammon's unholy gains. Heavily indeed has the foot of Mammon pressed upon the manhood of the world. And not less has the world's womanhood suffered under the same tyranny. The crouching girl, from whom Hope's robe of green has slipped away, leaving her naked and helpless under Mammon's iron hand, epitomizes a yet more dreadful story of wrong.[1]

2. *Money as a means of grace.*—Notwithstanding the severe warning which is conveyed in the designation of money as 'mammon of unrighteousness,' Jesus does not denounce wealth as such. Though money, or the love of it, actually is a root of all kinds of evil, there is a right use of it. If that right use can be understood, the very character of money may be changed. Devote mammon to the service of God and man, and, though you cannot serve God and Mammon, you may with mammon serve God. Jesus therefore frankly accepts money as one of the inevitable conditions of human life. And His teaching is that its right use is so to employ it that we form around us a spiritual kinship, a lasting society of friends and sympathizers in the Eternal World.

¶ The Countess of Huntingdon possessed both social position and wealth, and she threw the ægis of the one and the reinforcement of the other on the side of the Evangelical Revival. She used the unrighteous mammon so as to win friends in the Eternal World, and whilst she, in the phraseology of the old evangelical school, would have told you it was all of Grace, yet she used mammon sacramentally.

(1) The application given in the parable is to the life which is to come. The obvious meaning is that the disciple can make friends by using his wealth for the relief of human distress and suffering, and that when he dies friends who entered first into their rest will be there to welcome him when he reaches the farther shore. The features of the picture need not be taken literally, but there can be no objection to the idea that Heaven will be more of a heaven for those who did the works of the good Samaritan on earth.

(2) As regards this life, wealth may be made spiritually profitable by increasing our powers of service, and thereby contributing to the development of a nobler type of character. No doubt there are Christian graces of the highest kind which flourish best in the soil of poverty—else had our Lord not spoken the hard saying about the camel and the eye of a needle, and included among the Beatitudes 'Blessed are ye poor'; but it is also true that the man who has command of money has a special opportunity of cultivating virtues which will materially enrich his character.

Of the many marvels of the age in which we live one of the greatest is the power which a rich man has, by a mere stroke of his pen, of claiming the knowledge, the skill, and the devotion of suitable instruments, and of using them for the accomplishment of whatever great and noble purposes his imagination may have conceived. Is he interested in education? Schools of learning start into being or launch out on larger enterprises at his behest. Is his heart touched by a feeling for the sufferings of his kind? He can create or sustain the beneficent institutions of the Infirmary and the Convalescent Home, and he can requisition the ministrations of the highest medical skill and of the most disinterested human kindness. Most striking of all, perhaps, is the contribution which wealth can make to the furtherance of the Gospel and the extension of the Kingdom of God. Under the conditions of our time it is made easy for a rich man to link his mind to the faith and the holy enthusiasms of an apostolic spirit, or of a band of missionary workers, and indefinitely to extend and multiply any efforts of which he would himself be capable by identifying his personality with the voices that proclaim the Gospel in the farthest or darkest places of the earth, and with the hands which do the works of Christ among the weary and the heavy-laden.

¶ As the late Dr Morrison, *The Times* corre-

[1] H. W. Shrewsbury, *The Visions of an Artist*, 116.

spondent in China, so well said: 'If the missionaries made no converts for ten years, I should consider that two or three thousand of them scattered over this vast Empire to be doing work well worth the paltry cost. So long as they remain the sole agents of civilization to befriend the poor and the sick, standing by them in time of epidemics, flood, drought, and famine, and putting to shame their horrible superstition, the money is well spent.'

And further, it is to be observed with thankfulness that the privilege thus associated with wealth is one which can be shared by persons of modest means, and even by persons described as poor, as members of humane societies, and especially as members of the great spiritual and philanthropic co-partnery which we know as the Christian Church. Great as is the power of the wealthy individual to do good, it is surpassed by the power of the multitude which bands itself together for co-operation in good works; and membership in a great Church carries with it the opportunity, not merely of identifying ourselves with and helping on the highest kind of work that is being done among men, but of being more possessed than before by the Spirit of Christ, and baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire.[1]

The Eternal Tents

Luke xvi. 9.—'That . . . they may receive you into everlasting habitations.'

THE Greek which is represented by 'everlasting habitations' invites the more definite and vivid rendering, 'the eternal tents.' It is an odd phrase, and one of the most significant and instructive in the New Testament. It occurs nowhere else in the Holy Scriptures. This means that it is peculiar to our Lord; and He employed it to convey a great lesson to our imaginations and hearts. The thought which it expresses is one of the most helpful in all His teaching, one which bears consideration and richly rewards it. It is a thought which sheds light on the dim mystery of the Hereafter, and affords us a glimpse of that future life whither our hearts keep turning so constantly and so wistfully, and brings home to us certain truths which we are apt to miss.

[1] W. P. Paterson, in *The Expository Times*, xxxv. 391.

1. 'The eternal tents.' This is our Lord's description of Heaven; and if we would feel the force of it and catch its true interpretation we must remember the history of ancient Israel. This haunting phrase was an echo in His heart of the days far gone when the people of His fathers were wanderers in the wilderness, and their white tents dotted the desert. Pilgrims, following a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, they looked forward to a land of promise, and to a city that hath foundations. And when, after weary years, they at last reached the land of their dreams, built them cities and temples and uplifted a noble civilization, the memory of those days haunted all their history. Their desert journey became, in the minds of their poets and prophets, a symbol of the pilgrimage of humanity in the world, of the fleetingness of mortal things.

2. The peculiarity of the phrase is that it is a contradiction in terms; for if there be one thing which less than any other can be predicated of a tent it is that it is eternal. This is precisely what a tent is not. It is a frail and fleeting thing, pitched to-day and struck to-morrow, a fitting image of life's transience.

¶ Writing to his wife, from his camp in the Desert of Tih, Professor MacEwen said: 'We left Nakhl at 7.30 this morning with our new escort. It is always confusing to make a fresh start, for the baggage has to be distributed among the camels, and the cameleers have to be instructed. But it was an entertaining delay. The whole population, women excepted, turned out to stare and squatted close beside us, as the "house of our tabernacle was dissolved." Do you know that those words mean literally "the dwelling of this tent is undone or unfastened," and do you remember that St Paul was a tent-maker'?[1]

'Mine age,' says the prophet, 'is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent.' Yet Jesus speaks of 'the Eternal Tents.' Had He followed the line of thought familiar to the Jewish imagination, He would have said: 'Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into the Eternal City, the City which hath the founda-

[1] D. S. Cairns, *Life and Times of A. R. MacEwen, D.D.*, 154.

tions.' But no, He gives the phrase this odd turn and says, 'into the Eternal Tents,' combining two words with contradictory ideas. We have on the one hand, stability—on the other, movement.

3. What would Christ teach us by this description of Heaven?

(1) He means, in the first place, to disabuse our minds of an idea to which they are prone. He would have us understand that, while there will be rest in Heaven, it will not be the rest of inactivity. There will be rest, but our strivings will not cease, nor our yearnings and our achievements. Of course there will be no more sinning; for we shall see the Lord's face, and we shall be like Him when we see Him as He is. There will be an end of sinning, but not of service or of discovery of the inexhaustible wonder, the unfathomable mystery of the love and wisdom of God. The rest which the text speaks of is not the rest of idleness, for in idleness there is no rest but intolerable weariness. Is not this a lesson of our common experience?

¶ Dr Samuel Johnson once told a curious anecdote of an eminent tallow-chandler in London who had acquired a considerable fortune and had given up the trade in favour of his foreman. He soon grew weary, and paid frequent visits to his old shop; and he desired that they would let him know their 'melting-days,' and he would come and assist them; which, says Johnson, he accordingly did.

The Lord loves us too well to doom us to the misery of eternal inactivity. We shall have our appointed tasks; and in the doing of them we shall find our exceeding gladness. For there will be no weakness and no weariness in that land of enlargement. Our faculties, which are here so bounded and so dim, will there be emancipated and purified, and we shall know the ecstasy of a full, unfettered life.

When fell, to-day, the word that she had gone,
Not this my thought: Here a bright journey ends,
Here rests a soul unresting; here, at last,
Here ends that earnest strength, that generous life—
For all her life was giving. Rather this
I said (after the first swift, sorrowing pang):
Hence, on a new quest, starts an eager spirit—
No dread, no doubt, unhesitating forth
With asking eyes; pure as the bodiless souls
Whom poets vision near the central throne
Angelically ministrant to man;
So fares she forth with smiling, Godward face;
Nor should we grieve, but give eternal thanks—
Save that we mortal are, and needs must mourn.[1]

(2) There is another lesson in our text. It was not for nothing that the Israelites endured that long ordeal of homeless wandering ere they reached their 'city of habitation.' It was their discipline in faith and courage, their preparation for the heritage which God had appointed for them. And so our earthly life, with all its unrest and weariness and disappointment, is our discipline for the service which awaits us in the City of God.

Those sorrows of ours, those sufferings and frailties of our feeble flesh which exclude us from so much of the sunshine and gladness of this beautiful world, those reverses in business, and all the other things which make our hearts sore and our burdens heavy—think what they are. They are God's discipline, and they are designed to work in us faith and courage and patience and hope. And, after all, these are the things which count. It is not the man who achieves the most tangible success or builds himself the highest monument in the sight of the world that has got the most out of life. No, it is the man whose heart has been softened, whose soul has been purified, whose imagination has been touched and elevated. The purpose of all God's dealings with us is to make us brave and gentle and kind; and these qualities are the prize of life and the indispensable equipment for the Eternal Tents.

[1] R. W. Gilder.

FAITHFULNESS

Luke xii. 42.—'Who then is that faithful and wise steward . . . ?'
Luke xvi. 10.—'He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much.'
Matt. xxv. 23.—'Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'
1 Cor. iv. 2.—'It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.'
Rev. ii. 10.—'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.'

'There are two great voices of exhortation ringing through the Bible. The first voice bids us have faith, and the second voice bids us keep faith. To have faith is the seed and root of religion: to keep faith is the flower and fruit of religion.'[1]

Our subject is the keeping of faith, that faithfulness which reflection shows to lie very near the heart of religion, to be the cement of human society, and to constitute at once the foundation and the crown of character.

I

WHAT FAITHFULNESS MEANS

1. The faithful man is he who is trustworthy, he upon whom others may rely with confidence that their trust will not be misplaced. From this or that angle we may best describe his faithfulness as loyalty, or fidelity, or constancy, or conscientiousness, or honour, or honesty. Each term has its own beauty and each its own fitness as the circumstances of the case vary; but the essence of them all is trustworthiness. He who in all the relationships of life may be trusted to do his duty and to do it well; he whose word is as good as his bond; he who will endeavour to keep all his promises though it should turn out that he has sworn to his own hurt; he who by keeping faith with God and man is ever true to himself—such is the faithful man.

2. To attain and to manifest this great quality of faithfulness, be it noted, is possible for all. Faithful exercise of such powers as we have, we can all attain unto. 'A washerwoman can be as faithful as a Newton.' 'We should bless God that even in the paths of common life He does not deny the humblest of His children this opportunity of being "faithful unto death" in the simple, ordinary course of nature. Do you not remember one after another whose life is truly summed up in those three words? They fought in no great war, save that which never ceases—the war against unfaithfulness: a father who worked on for wife and children until he lay down for his long rest; a mother, perhaps a widow, who was faithful to the children left her to rear, working day in, day out, until strength failed. Were it not for the multitude of souls thus faithful, the world would break down and perish.'[1]

[1] T. H. Darlow, *The Upward Calling*, 30.

II

FAITHFULNESS TO GOD AND MAN

He who is faithful is true to God and true to man. Not that the two really admit of any clear-cut separation. They are most intimately related. Quite clearly they have much in common, and are distinguishable only as some of our activities are more directly determined by religious and by social considerations.

Let us consider first what has to be said of the implications of faithfulness in both its Godward and its social aspects.

1. Faithfulness means sincerity. That is so plain that it needs simply to be stated. Let us never fancy, however, that the importance of absolute sincerity in the performance of either religious or social duties can be exaggerated. And let us be on our guard against the insincerity which subtly and almost insensibly steals over us as we tend to become mechanical and perfunctory in the doing of duty, mere creatures of routine, custom and convention. The insincere man is plainly not trustworthy, at any moment he may prove to be a traitor.

2. Faithfulness means honour, and requires that a solemn promise made either to God or to man must be kept at whatever cost. Vows to

[1] J. S. Carroll, *The Motherhood of God*, 280.

God are not to be broken. Engagements, bargains, contracts entered into with men must be fulfilled. Mental reservations, 'sharp practice,' clever juggling with the plain meaning of words, are all odious and sinful, absolutely incompatible with faithfulness. The faithful will keep his vow to God and keep his word to man, or perish in the attempt. There is this, however, to be remembered. Many like Jephthah have made very foolish vows. Many more like Herod have had reason to regret the giving of a promise, the possibilities of which they had ill considered. Many a life has been ruined in an attempt to discharge 'debts of honour' which should never have been incurred. Men have landed themselves in miseries unspeakable, and dragged others down with them, because of foolish or sinful entanglements in which by a rash word they became involved. Alas for him who without dishonour can neither keep nor break his word! The taking of a vow to God and the making of a promise to man should ever be matter of prudent consideration.

3. Faithfulness requires that we realize our stewardship. If it be required in a steward that he be found faithful, it is required of the faithful man that he act as a steward with whatever time, resources and opportunities he has been gifted. We are faithless both to God and to man if ever we forget that. Whatever we have, we hold in trust for God and for the service of man. A faithful steward will never complain about the amount entrusted to him; he will be concerned merely to put to the best account whatever he has. He will never be careless or selfish in his use of it, but in all things will seek to know and obey the Master's will and to further the general good.

'I find everything uplifting in this idea of stewardship. There is *noblesse oblige*. There is loyalty to ancestors. There is that truest patriotism which seeks to embody and to perpetuate the good name of the country. There is faith too, and a kind of reverence, as feeling that this high behaviour which is expected of us is not ours to reduce or to compromise.' [1]

Faithful stewardship involves this further, that we shall not only do to the best of our ability whatever we do, but that what we give our strength to do shall be the highest and most fruitful kind of service to God and man of which we are capable. Otherwise we are defrauding both God and man, copying him who hid his talent in the earth. Our Lord, we may assume, made excellent ploughs and yokes in the carpenter's shop in Nazareth. But alas for the world if he had not deserted that for a task far different. If Clive had remained on his office stool; if many of our statesmen, shrinking from the rough and tumble of political life, had remained in the quiet callings in which they began; if many a great artist had continued at the easy and comfortable means of livelihood which he had to surrender for the struggle and privations of his higher calling;—would not such be rightly dubbed traitor, faithless both to God and to humanity.

It may be seriously questioned if too many of us are not the slaves of comfort, too timid to hazard anything by 'launching out into the deep.' Abraham, 'Father of the faithful,' went out, not knowing whither he went, but such courage is rare. Without leaving our ordinary task, however, have we not all much leisure which might be turned to better use? Opportunities for the service of the highest interests of our fellows abound; let us use them to whatever extent we are fitted.

4. Faithfulness means constancy and consistency. God and man both expect that underlying all our behaviour there are principles which our acts exemplify, a conscience whose dictates we obey. Unswerving obedience to God's law, fidelity to the principles of one's party, and to the aims and interests of whatever associations we enter, manifestly such consistency is of the very essence of trustworthiness. No doubt there is a consistency which is the bogey or the fetish of little minds, we shall see what that means directly, but without relative consistency a man cannot possibly win a name for faithfulness. We cannot trust the unknown, and an inconsistent man is not only unknown but unknowable.

5. But faithfulness means, too, obedience to the heavenly vision, and that vision may play havoc with what we used to think eternal truths. To all who are truly alive, and certainly to all who are in living fellowship with God, new views of truth and duty frequently

[1] J. A. Hutton, *The Victory over Victory*, 212.

come. God has fresh light to impart, and by that light when it comes we must walk. In comparison with faithfulness to the light mere consistency becomes of little account. Adherence to the old and familiar ceases then to be a virtue, and becomes a snare and a fetter. Prejudices are mistaken for principles, and empty catch-words are mistaken for inspiring watch-words. If we are persuaded that a vision of new truth or duty has come to us, we have only one duty towards it and that is to obey, as St Paul did. It may for a time bring on us rebuke and reproach. Faithfulness to the new may look very like a breach of faith with the old. We may be pitied as 'lost leaders,' derided as dreamers, or denounced as traitors. No matter, we dare not disobey. 'We needs must love the highest when we see it.' We must obey God rather than man. The things that are behind must be forgotten if we would press toward the mark for the prize. And in the end it will be perfectly plain that in obeying the heavenly vision we have not only been faithful to God, but have, in the truest sense, been faithful to man likewise.

Little remains to add concerning faithfulness to God and faithfulness to man, taking them separately.

The former requires that we, recognizing that all that we have is His and that we ourselves are His, shall live and do all things to His glory, and strive for the advancement of His Kingdom. It means, too, that when He leads us by strange ways we shall still trust and doubt nothing of His Love and Wisdom. It means, too, that in a world where there is so much in flagrant contradiction of His will, we shall not keep silence, but be valiant in making known what His will is, and in striving to make it prevail. Most important, it means that we shall ever avoid by our unworthiness bringing dishonour on His name.

Faithfulness to man means that in all the relationships of life which we enter we shall 'play the game.' He who is faithful will preserve inviolate the sanctities of the home. In business he will be diligent, but of transparent honesty. He will not be expert in the 'tricks of his trade.' He will not offer to the public scamped work, or adulterated goods or goods with a fallacious label attached. The faithful man will serve the community and his country in as many ways as he has means and opportunity. He will be loyal and serviceable to as many associations as he enters. And in all he will regard his fellows not with suspicion, never with pride or arrogance or contempt, not with the eyes of a cynic, but with the eyes of Christ. Moved with pity at all their sorrows and perplexities and follies and sins, he will strive, as the Master did, to go about doing good, and so keep faith at once with man and with Christ, proving himself 'a good and faithful servant' meet for 'the joy of his Lord.'

III

THE REWARD OF FAITHFULNESS

1. Faithfulness always costs something, and sometimes costs a great deal. Loyalty to their prince in 1745 cost the clansmen dear. Fidelity to our pledged word in 1914 cost our nation a price than can never be calculated. The story of the sufferings of the noble army of Martyrs shows what faithfulness to Christ may cost. In our own more obscure lives there may seem to be nothing comparable to the magnitude of such sacrifice as loyalty on the heroic scale demands. Yet, if our faithfulness costs us nothing, it is time to suspect its quality. For faithfulness means firm adherence to a choice, and often the choice itself is painful, and adherence to it involves the surrender of much, perhaps, that was valuable. He who would be faithful to any high quest or task, must 'scorn delights and live laborious days,' and follow a path that in some respects is narrow and lonely. That is inevitable. Often, too, in quite humble walks of life we discover what unthought-of sacrifices and surrenders have been quietly and courageously made. Trials and temptations come into every life, and faithfulness means the surmounting of both.

2. But if the cost be high, the reward in every case far outweighs whatever cost there be. Faithfulness is crowned with the favour of God, and soon or late is approved by men. Man's approbation, indeed, is apt to be late. Too often the world can only build the sepulchres of the prophets and the other faithful whom a former generation slew or despised. Too often garlands are hung on the tomb of

those whose living brow received not laurels but thorns. Still it is something that even so tragically late, faithfulness should be honoured among men. In the long run it is only the faithful who are held in esteem, are pointed to as examples, and live in the history or in the memories of men as the chosen of the race.

Manifold are the rewards of faithfulness, but they are all summed up in one phrase, 'the crown of life'; and by the crown of life is just meant life which is life indeed, life at its best, its richest and fullest, life which is strong, free and joyous.

3. This reward of a crown of life is not held in reserve for the faithful in some other sphere. It is their portion here and now. Yet with radiant hope the loyal may look forward to a higher and happier state, to a life to come, when, all earth's shadows past, they are together with their Lord whom here with many a faltering step, it may be, and with many a slip, they seek to follow. 'Thus,' says Bunyan in his immortal allegory, 'Thus came Faithful to his end. Now I saw that there stood behind the multitude a chariot and a couple of horses waiting for Faithful, who, soon as his adversaries had dispatched him, was taken up into it, and straightway was carried up through the clouds, with sound of trumpet, the nearest way to the Celestial Gate.'

There at the heavenly portal the faithful will hear the most wonderful words one can ever hope to hear, words indeed which would be beyond our hope, had not Christ assured us—God's voice saying, 'Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'

IV

THE CULTURE OF FAITHFULNESS

Faithfulness being thus so necessary, so beautiful, so richly rewarded, it concerns us to ask how we may attain unto it. For all of us who know ourselves will confess with shame and sorrow that we cannot claim to exhibit it to anything like the degree that is needful. How may we hope to become more faithful? How is the growth of faithfulness to be fostered? We may be well assured that so lovely a blossom of character needs special care.

1. The root of faithfulness is faith. While it would be misleading to define faithfulness as just fullness of faith, it is quite true that the one is just the fruition, and the manifestation of the other. 'He that would be faithful must, in the deepest sense, be full of faith.'

Faith which is fundamentally the soul's grasp of God, is faith which works, and works by love, and so working unfolds itself in all the beauteous forms of faithfulness. Faithfulness is thus the product and the test of faith. 'Ah! when will this standard of faith be taken? In honest endeavour rightly, in all activities of life, to act as His stewards, we prove our orthodoxy. To speak of creed-singers who go about the world hard-hearted, selfish, ungracious and untrue, who in the market on the Monday give the lie to their Sunday acknowledgment of the leadership and Lordship of Christ—to speak of these men as faith-possessing, is the distilled quintessence of religious nonsense.'[1] If we have true faith and tend it, faithfulness will be more and more manifest.

2. We must be prayerful. The life of faith is nourished by prayer. All who have been outstanding for loyalty to the highest have been prayerful men and women. What armed the martyrs for their ordeal but courage born of prayer? Because they walked with God and communed with Him as friend with friend, they saw in the dungeon, the block, or the stake only some disagreeable things by the wayside, not worth too serious consideration, things which in the case of many never interrupted their fellowship or their communings with God. If we would be faithful unto death or faithful at all, we must be strong in soul, and prayer alone can give us such strength. It is they who wait upon the Lord that renew their strength, and go on from strength to strength.

3. But we must watch as well as pray. We must learn to practise wisely the necessary but difficult discipline of self-examination. We would do well frequently to review our conduct and see how it squares with our principles. Above all, let us watch ourselves in what seem to be the little things. Only he who is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much. It is in the little things that most men fail. It is by petty disloyalties that character is under-

[1] J. R. P. Sclater, *The Enterprise of Life*, 222.

mined and the path opened to black treacheries. By small purloinings of the common fund, Judas prepared himself to sell his Lord. On the other hand it is by careful conscientious performance of what seems to be a trivial round of small, unimportant duties that we acquire the capacity for faithfulness which approaches the heroic scale. To Hudson Taylor, the famous Chinese missionary, every penny was a trust to be used for the Master. 'A little thing is a little thing' he often quoted in later life, 'but faithfulness in little things is a great thing.' [1]

Highly perilous it always and everywhere is to lower our standard, to tone down the firmness of principle, to compromise in any degree. 'They asked the Rabbi Gamaliel whether he would not consent to depart from some rule of devotion on the evening of his marriage day. His answer was, "I will not for one day, or even for one hour, abandon the sovereignty of God." He belonged, he knew, to a great rule, a great tradition. He had upon him the honour of the heavenly kingdom.' [2]

4. Then for our comfort let us remember that while such constant watchfulness and vigilance to discern and to escape from all the wiles of the tempter, means unceasing effort on our part, in this whole business we are not left to ourselves. The Father is with us, and His grace is sufficient for us. 'The God who demands faithfulness, is faithful in aiding them that desire it. There is a bargain between Him and us; and His part of the bargain will be fulfilled.'

'Faithful is He that called you.' 'The Lord is faithful who shall stablish you.' 'He is faithful that has promised.' Yes, it is the faithfulness of God on which we must rest.

W. D. Niven.

The Supreme Test

Luke xvi. 10.—'Faithful in that which is least.'

In the parable with which these words are associated our Lord commends the forethought of the steward. He says there is far more prudence, prescience, and common sense manifested by men in the pursuit of small ends than by Christian people in the service of God, and lest any man should complain of the slenderness of his equipment, the straitness of his circumstances, He lays it down as a principle that it is not quantity but ability, not abundance but the way in which we handle the 'little' things of daily life, that decides our life and destiny.

We can see the importance of this principle when we remember how largely our lives are compact of little things. Even to the greatest, the chance of doing great things rarely comes; to many people, perhaps never at all. There are some mountain rocks that have been formed by sudden upheavals of the molten earth. But there are others, like the chalk cliffs of Dover, which are built by countless organisms so minute that the naked eye would fail to see them. And life is like the latter. It is built up of very small things.

1. We make a great mistake if we regard this faithfulness in that which is least as an elementary attainment. It is not a sort of first standard qualification fitting a novice for the second standard. It is the honourable passing of a severe ordeal. It is probable that character is more surely revealed, and still more certainly impoverished or enriched, in what seem to be the little occasions of life than in those which seem to be great. It is likely that the real test comes not in the crisis of some single crashing event, but in the long-drawn-out process of wearisome and smaller events. The big sensation is not as revealing as the little irritation. 'It is not the dying for a faith,' cries Dick Steele in *Esmond*, 'it is the living it that is so hard.'

¶ Is there anything finer in all literature than the way Carlyle faced that great catastrophe—the burning of his *French Revolution* by his friend John Stuart Mill? All his painful labour gone for nothing, no possibility of recapturing the spirit of the work, and little money in the home! Yet we see from his Diary that his chief thoughts were for Mill's unhappiness. And this is the same man who made himself miserable and turned his house upside down because his neighbour—Miss Lambert—played the piano for half an hour in the morning. How could he write his *Life of Cromwell* 'alongside of that damnable noise!'

[1] *Life of Hudson Taylor*, 100.
[2] P. N. Waggett, *Our Profession*, 70.

The heart which boldly faces death
  Upon the battlefield, and dares
Cannon and bayonet, faints beneath
  The needle-points of frets and cares.
The stoutest spirits they dismay—
The tiny stings of every day.

Ah! more than martyr's aureole,
  And more than hero's heart of fire,
We need the humble strength of soul
  Which daily toils and ills require.
Sweet Patience, grant us, if you may,
An added grace for every day.[1]

'He is greatest in his own classroom!' That was the testimony given by an eminently qualified student concerning one of the greatest and most powerful men of our time. He was a giant on small occasions. He revealed himself at his mightiest, not when he faced vast assemblies and received the homage of tumultuous applause, but when he was out of sight, when the crowd was away, and no reporter was linking him with the wider world. It is an index of rare wealth of character, and the test is specially pertinent to all who claim to be followers of Christ. Is the power of our spiritual current evident in commonplace tasks? Is the King's superscription on the penny as well as on the pound? Is it stamped on our unrehearsed conversation as clearly as on our prepared and conventional speech? Is it sealed on the secret thought as well as on the public deed? Are we faithful 'in that which is least'?

2. Again, mark this as telling the importance of these little things. Only through the small services of life faithfully done can we be ready for the great services when God is pleased to send them. God measures the service that He will give us to-morrow, not from our talents so much as from the faithfulness with which we serve to-day. You think it was lack of education, lack of influence that held you back? It may have been. But is there not a possibility that it was lack of faithfulness? The strongest barrier to a better to-morrow is a misspent to-day. And faithful service in this so wearisome to-day is the one highway to larger spheres to-morrow.

[1] *Sunday Afternoon Verses*, edited by W. Robertson Nicoll.

3. And after all, how can we tell which act is small, which great? These measurements are human, not Divine. God's standard is very different from ours. If we could tell the ever-widening influence upon the world of the smallest kindnesses love ever did, we should never again call them small. If every little thing were truly little, we should not think to find them in the great life of Jesus. Yet Jesus gave a promise to little congregations; He crowned with praise the widow's little gift; and took the little children in His arms. If all small services were really small, we should not look for them in Jesus' work. Yet, with a world to save, He went about villages doing good. Viewed from the altitude of heaven, much of our greatness is the veriest trifling, and many a trifle of ours is truly great. It is the motive, it is the spirit, and not the greatness of the consequences, that makes things great with God. As Herbert Spencer says, 'No alchemy can produce golden conduct out of leaden motives.' The smallest act is great if done for Christ. The greatest act is small if done for self.

¶ John Newton, the famous preacher, once said that if two angels were sent down from heaven, one to conduct an empire and the other to sweep a street, they would feel no inclination to change employment; and two hundred years before him the saintly George Herbert had said:

Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws
Makes that and the action fine.

What the world needs above all else to-day is consecrated character, and that is just what service in small things shows. Great services reveal our possibilities. Small services reveal our consecration. And in the latter, rather than in the former, lies our best hope of influencing the world. God brings the glory of the autumn hills out of a million indecipherable heather-bells. God brings the glory of the rainbow out of a million indistinguishable drops. And God can bring the glory of a consecrated character out of that countless multitude of little deeds that form our life.

Two Worlds

Luke xvi. 13.—'No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.'

We must all have put to ourselves some time or other the question: 'Is there any place whatever for the modern industrial world, with its vivid and highly organized interest in the production and possession of temporal goods of all kinds, in the scheme of life as our Lord saw it and taught it?' On the one hand we are face to face with a set of hard, concrete facts. Practically the whole of our civilization is organized with a view to material production. National education is called upon to meet its requirements on pain of being found insufficient, if not useless or even harmful. Art and religion may seem to hold themselves aloof from the organization of life on an industrial basis. They need not minister to it. They may even consciously protest against it. But even they depend upon it. Their activities correspond in a certain measure with its shrinkage or expansion. The network is complete.

But then, perhaps, we turn round and look at the whole thing from an entirely different point of view. Instead of facing this material preoccupation of ours with a fundamental distrust, we suddenly take an optimistic tone about it. We feel that after all it is just this necessity of dealing with material things, of extracting from them their fruitfulness and value, that has created all or most of the moral force there is in the world. We see, of course, all the dishonesty, the injustice, the sensual riot, the insane luxury, which have gone hand in hand with its development. But we are not shaken in our confident reading of the past or in our equally confident outlook on the future. We reflect that the active vices spring from the same soil as the active virtues; and these are just the vices of an overflowing life, of an unregulated activity. After all, the only vice that is irremediable is the vice of the sluggish soul, of the torpid and moveless society.

We have been reflecting thus perhaps—it is no uncommon mood of present-day reflection—and then we come suddenly again in our thoughts to the ethics of the Gospels. We feel that our Lord's estimate of life and its real forces must be true, and we feel, too, that that estimate cuts clean athwart our own. And yet we cannot indict the civilization from which we draw our own life-blood. And so we hang hesitant between two contrary impulses.

1. Now, it may be that all this disquietude we are giving ourselves is quite unnecessary and that we should look elsewhere for the real difficulties of our religious life. We are not going to minimize our Lord's words, but let us see what it is that St Luke reports Him as saying.

It is noteworthy that that Evangelist concludes his discourse with the famous saying—'Ye cannot serve God and mammon.' That is the teaching which our Lord would enforce. No one can serve two rival masters, two masters who demand two opposed qualities of service. If a man is set on mere material possession, if his whole life is absorbed in the pleasure of acquisition, if that acquisition is in itself his exceeding great reward, then he is a servant of Mammon and his soul is chained to that service. Nothing can possibly set him free to seek a higher service but the act by which he delivers himself wholly and finally from the lower.

Nothing of course can be more true. It is indeed so much a part of all experience that, stated in that bald way, it is a truism. But does that saying of our Lord's condemn our civilization, a civilization, that is to say, organized at all points for the effective conquest of material nature? We know, indeed, that our Lord, even in the midst of the Roman world, had no civilization comparable in this regard with our own before His eyes. We know that His life as a Galilean peasant was far removed from the circle of ideas which could have appreciated at its full import even the then existing material civilization of Rome. We know that He yet saw enough, in those Greek cities of the Decapolis on the other side of Jordan, of the moral ruin wrought by wealth, of the immoral self-indulgence to which it so often ministered, to justify Him in speaking of wealth as the unrighteous mammon. But when all this has been said, it yet remains true that our Lord recognizes the need of some material basis for life and the fact that some adaptation of nature by men, however slight, was needed to establish that basis. The

only question for Him was for what purpose did men propose to use the life founded on that basis, in what service did they propose to enlist it. Did they propose to fall down and worship the work of their own hands, or did they propose to turn that work into an obedient instrument which would help them the better to seek and to serve the Eternal Worker?

2. It was a high lesson, that of our Lord's, a lesson that dispels all the craven and somewhat hypocritical fears which sometimes beset the religious world. There are not two rival worlds existing side by side, exacting from us contradictory types of service. If we may speak of two worlds at all, then one encloses the other, one claims and takes up into itself all the energies of the other. For it alone the other exists. In it the other is rooted and to it aspires. And if life, and more abundant life, is the secret of that eternal world which englobes the temporal, if energy and force and all high endeavour are its eternal notes, if its King is He who worketh hitherto, then the safety of the human soul, the health of the human world, lie in activity here on the temporal plane.

The world has not necessarily gone back because it has thrown itself into the organization on a vast scale of the production of material things. On the contrary it has thereby made an immense stride forward, and this not at all because it is making more things, but because the making of them demands and evokes richer and more varied qualities of spirit. The material advance is at least the pledge and necessary instrument of the spiritual.

3. Yet just here lies the danger. The material may forget the spiritual for which it exists. We may rest in the means as if it were the end.

¶ In an intimate and vivid account of her native country, a Tibetan lady contrasts the civilization of Tibet with what she finds in England. 'You have a great many things,' she says, 'that we have not. Wonderful things. Your electricity and the various uses to which it is put, your steamers and trains and motor-cars and aeroplanes, especially your machines of all kinds. I am never tired of looking at your machines. What each does and how it does it. It is fascinating. And then there are the thousands of beautiful and useful objects in your shops. You are indeed a wonderful people to have produced all this wealth of material culture.

'But there is another aspect of the matter. These things are very desirable in themselves and the spirit that produced them is beyond praise, but people should not misuse them or struggle for them. If wealth becomes the goal of endeavour, men's minds are taken off other things we consider more important. And some people in their struggle for wealth or fear of poverty set aside the principles of right living, even of humanity, sacrificing their souls to this strange god whom we have not.

'You are rightly proud of your material culture, but you must not think peoples without it are necessarily uncivilized. Civilization and material culture are not one and the same. Your peasants have but few of the things your townsmen enjoy, yet they are no less civilized, they might indeed be more. It is a question of spiritual outlook.'[1]

But we do not need to get away from the material in order to find the spiritual. We need only to possess ourselves in the midst of the activities it has provoked, to stand off a little in spirit from the turmoil of the struggle in which we are engaged, so that we may catch its own suggestions. And we shall find that it suggests God. For it suggests all the beneficent power of human action. It suggests justice and truth and fellowship. And those things are vistas through which we see, media through which we feel, the Infinite. It is because through them we hear the word of God coming to us with a natural and familiar power that they are precious to us. They bind us to one another in binding us to God. They bind us to God in binding us to one another. And the high service of the Mammon of unrighteousness, of the Mammon which will always be unrighteous if it refuses to be a servant and claims to rule, is that it is the immediate and universal instrument by which these high qualities are evoked in us, by which these eternal bonds are fashioned.[2]

[1] Rin-Chen Lha-Mo (Mrs Louis King), *We Tibetans*, 99.
[2] A. L. Lilley, *The Religion of Life*, 124.

The Storming of the Kingdom

Luke xvi. 16.—'The kingdom of God is preached, and every man entereth violently into it' (R.V.).

This is a most vehement and impetuous figure. We must realize the intensity and the daring of it if we would appreciate the Master's teaching. 'Every man entereth violently into it.' It is almost suggestive of a determined burglary, the swift and terrific seizure of imprisoned treasure. It is significant of an obstinate and venturesome siege, the carrying of bristling forts by storm!

Is this our familiar conception of the pilgrim-band? Do we commonly regard them as a storming party, winning height after height of the promised inheritance? There are other figures of speech which fill the popular mind. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' But how far removed from the spirit of violence, and how little likely to capture a height by storm! We fail at the reconciliation of the figures! 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.' But is meekness synonymous with violence? Is meekness a spirit of rush and vehemence and holy daring? When we think of the pilgrim hosts, treading the way to the celestial city, it is with quite other forms and colours that our imagination works.

We associate meekness with reserve, timidity, shrinking; rarely do we link it with the strong and fearless advances of a Gapon, the terrible, fiery invective of a Savonarola, or the dashing, magnetic leadership of a Garibaldi. Meekness without passion is worthless. Poverty of spirit divorced from strength and daring will never plant a standard on the heights of the New Jerusalem. In the true man of the Kingdom, meekness comprehends the spirit of violence, and the poor in spirit are tremendous and invincible. John Bunyan was a meek man, a man of great poverty of spirit, a man of profound and penitential humility, but let some law of the land, or some magistrate in whom the law was incarnate, stride across the heavenward way and impede the pilgrim's advance, and the meekness assumed the guise of resistance, and the penitent prepared to take the position by storm. Oliver Cromwell was a meek man, with his head often bowed in self-abasement, and hiding low at the place of mercy and redeeming love; but let king or parliament lay hands upon the crown rights of the Lord, and meekness reveals its hidden fires, and the Kingdom of Heaven must be taken by storm. The true child of the Kingdom is distinguished by force of character, by the power of unflinching persistence, by the determination to recapture the strongholds of sin, and to plant upon their heights the banner of the Lord. Our Lord came to make strong men.

¶ George Sands writes: 'Humility of mind is a monkish virtue which God forbids to reformers.' It is not so. Meekness was the grand characteristic of our Lord; it is repeatedly and most touchingly revealed in St Paul; and, whatever his traducers may say, the humility of Martin Luther was profound. A Turkish proverb well discriminates: 'A man is harder than iron, more delicate than the rose.' Noble men are ever thus; they have a side of lowliness, softness, condescension, helpfulness, the delicacy and sweetness of the rose; and with this simplicity and gentleness they blend qualities of the utmost strength and steadfastness.[1]

1. Force of character is not always a pure and elevating energy. There are many forceful characters found in the way of sin. 'I do not think you could be so bad a man,' said the faithful Mackellar to the Master of Ballantrae, 'if you had not all the machinery for being a good one.'[2] Judas Iscariot must have been a man of commanding force of character, who in any society would most naturally have moved to the front. His vigour, his determination, his singleness of purpose, his passion—all alike distinguished him from the common throng. He had force enough, but it was perverse. No one will question that Lady Macbeth was a woman of most wealthy force of character. She is the most commanding figure in the entire tragedy. She moves to her purpose with enormous energy, with passionate vehemence, with intense and concentrated decision, and ruin and desolation fill her ways. These are types of forceful character, men and women of violence, endowed with personal energies like the hidden forces of the planet.

Now, when the Lord Jesus Christ, the

[1] W. L. Watkinson, *The Ashes of Roses*, 164.
[2] R. L. Stevenson.

Sovereign of the Kingdom, comes to men and women like these, and His offer of friendship and redemption is accepted, what happens? He does not destroy their force, He *transforms it.* In the Apostle Paul we have a sample of this gracious transformation. Here is violence, if you will have it! 'Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord.' There you have force enough, violence enough! What will you do with this man? Will you just put out his fires and make him like a damped-down furnace? Or will you let him retain his passions, only purified and glorified? That is what happened. Not one jot of force did this man lose in his transference to the Kingdom.

2. But what happens when men and women have no force of character, when they are nerveless, and impotent—what happens when men and women of this type enter into communion and covenant with the Lord? This happens: the Lord who transforms the force of the violent *imparts force to the impotent.* There is nothing more sure than this, that when the lordship and friendship of the King are honestly and sincerely accepted, the fellowship begets within the soul the energy of a powerful life. If such strength is not begotten, the strength of a storming party, it is because our communion is defective, and our surrender is incomplete. You remember that great figure used by our Lord in the fourth chapter of St John? 'The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well.' It is the difference between a vessel of water and a spring. There is little or no energy in a jug of water, but who can measure the dynamics of a spring? When the Lord comes into the life, energy is born, movement begins, rivers flow! 'A well!' The figure suggests life with unfathomable resource; the transition from passionless existence to a rushing, dashing exuberance that takes the Kingdom by storm.

3. Here are some of the elements the Lord Christ adds to the life of weak men and women.

(1) He gives *decisiveness of aim.* Life detaches itself from a multiplicity of distractions and gathers strength by its own intensity. A man of one idea may overturn a commonwealth. A man of one commanding spiritual ambition shall sit with the Lord on His throne. 'This one thing I do,' and in the strength of that concentration all impotence is left behind.

(2) He gives to weak men and women *the energy of strong and lively feelings.* Says John Calvin: 'The Gospel awakens powerful emotions.' And so it does! You have only to turn to our hymns, to their great expressions of penitence, devotion, and praise, to see how the feelings of men are deepened and swayed by the marvellous constraints of redeeming love.

(3) And further still, He gives to impotent men *the strength that comes from the harmonizing of their powers.*

¶ Spurgeon has testified that one instant result of his conversion was that the heterogeneous knowledge that he possessed before, jumbled in his brain 'in glorious confusion,' as he described it, seemed afterwards to be ranged on shelves, so that he was able to lay his hand upon everything just when he needed it; and this power continued through his life.[1]

Our powers are discordant, fighting at loggerheads, and we are pulled a dozen different ways. Many men's souls are like an orchestral band before the conductor appears. Every instrument goes on journeys of its own proposing, and the result is Bedlam. And some men's souls are like an orchestra when the conductor has appeared, and all the instruments co-operate in most harmonious ministry.

¶ Dr James Lindsay, the well-known philosopher writes: 'Shortly before I went to college, there occurred in my youthful experience that which was destined to exercise a decisive influence over my life. It was of the nature of a religious crisis. In the indetermination of my life, I had for a few years alternated between seasons of religious reflection or concern, and times of sheer worldly aim and absorption. I mean, absorption in purely secular ambitions. At times my shrinking spirit was moved to the bases of the soul, my exterior the while one of unconcern. These alternations made my inner life deeply unsatisfying, so much so that, after profound mental exercise and spiritual reflection, I resolved to give up so divided a life, and, with that resolution, passed into the sunlight of spiritual certitude. I refrain from further detail of the experience, and am content to say I was in a new world—wherein I remained.'[2]

[1] W. Y. Fullerton, *C. H. Spurgeon*, 192.
[2] *Autobiography of Rev. James Lindsay, D.D.*, 17.

(4) And lastly, the Lord gives to impotent souls *the saving attribute of courage.* Courage is sorely smitten when the powers of the soul are divided. When the powers of the soul are one, a man puts on courage like a robe.

Are not these elements the equipment of strong and triumphant men—decisiveness of aim, energy of feeling, the harmony of the powers, and the contagious attribute of courage? Both the Word of God and human experience testify that this is the character the Lord creates, strong men endowed with healthy passions, brave men who move irresistibly to well-defined ends, 'men of violence,' who take the Kingdom of Heaven by force.

From strength to strength go on;
Wrestle, and fight, and pray;
Tread all the powers of darkness down,
And win the well-fought day.

Dives and Lazarus

Luke xvi. 19, 20.—'There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate.'

When we survey the Gospel according to St Luke as a whole, we see that one of the main interests of the Evangelist is in the teaching of Jesus about riches and poverty. This was so characteristic of our Lord and so emphatic that no one telling the story of His life could possibly miss it, yet Luke has preserved a good deal which the other Evangelists have overlooked. It is he alone who has the story of the unjust steward who shrewdly used his master's money to buy friends for himself who would give him the shelter of their roofs when he lost his place. The moral of this shady story is daringly put by our Lord Himself: 'And I say unto you, make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles.' It is a daring moral, not to be legally interpreted or applied, but with living power in it for those who are willing to take it as it is meant. Of course there will always be those who think they can refute it. 'The Pharisees,' we read, 'who were lovers of money, scoffed at him.' They scoffed at the idea of a man investing in charity with the dividend in his mind which he would draw in the world to come. It is always easy to misrepresent when you do not want to understand; and the story of the rich man and Lazarus is the answer of Jesus to those who scoffed at the moral He drew from the unjust steward. It is the story of a man who forgot to invest in charity till it was too late. It consists of a visible scene, a scene behind the veil, and an appendix. It is worth while to look steadily at each.

1. *The Visible Situation.*—The rich man's life is pictured before our eyes with all its indulgence and ostentation. There are lives like this, and people who can afford them. There is nothing they cannot buy—yachts, motor-cars, champagne, pictures, new and old books; no wish need be, and no wish is, ungratified. There is no needless exaggeration in the picture, and not a touch of animosity or of class feeling. It is not said that the rich man made his money unjustly; his way of living is exhibited—that is all. Then side by side with him we have the picture of Lazarus. It is given more fully, and of course more sympathetically, but quite as impartially. It is a statement of facts and nothing more. Lazarus was a beggar man, whose body was covered with ulcers, and he lay at the rich man's gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from his table. How desperately the poor man needed a friend! Yes, but not so desperately as the rich. What an opportunity, Jesus would have us understand, the rich man had to make Lazarus his friend—to buy his friendship with some of his miserable money. How much his friendship would have been worth to him in the future! But no such thing happened.

¶ Instead of seeking them out we turn away from them; shut ourselves within our park walls and garden gates, and are content to know that there is beyond them a whole world in wilderness; a world of secrets which we dare not penetrate, and of sufferings which we dare not conceive.[1]

I laid beside thy gate am Lazarus;
See me or see me not, I still am there,
Hungry and thirsty, sore and sick and bare,
Dog-comforted and crumbs-solicitous:
While thou in all thy ways art sumptuous,
Daintily clothed, with dainties for thy fare:
Thus a world's wonder thou art quit of care,

[1] Ruskin.

And, be I seen or not seen, I am thus.
One day a worm for thee, a worm for me:
With my worm angel songs and trumpet-burst
And plenitude an end of all desire:
But what for thee, alas! but what for thee?
Fire and an unextinguishable thirst,
Thirst in an unextinguishable fire.[1]

Perhaps under the influence of political economy we pity a little the rich man as well as the poor. We have a lurking sympathy with the rich man saying to himself, 'This is endless. Relieve one and you bring ten. This man is a product of social conditions for which society is responsible, not I; society should put him in a hospital and keep him out of sight; and if the hospital were put on the rates, I should not refuse to contribute my share.' But the very point of the story is that Jesus takes no account of possible explanations or excuses. He deals only with facts. There is a poor man, destitute and in misery, at a rich man's gate, and nothing is done.

2. *The Invisible Situation.*—In the world into which Lazarus and the rich man are alike ushered by death the parts are reversed. It is now Lazarus who feasts. He reclines on Abraham's bosom at the heavenly banquet, as John did on Jesus' breast at the Last Supper. It is the highest conceivable honour and felicity for a Jew. But the rich man is in hell. He saw Lazarus now afar off, and would fain have had him as a friend. But it was too late. He had his chance of making Lazarus his friend while he lay at his gate, but he did not take it then, and it would never come back. There is something inexpressibly awful in the words, *Son, remember.* It is the very misery of hell to remember the lost opportunities of life, the chances that were given but not taken of winning the heaven for which men are made. Inexpressibly awful, too, is the finality implied in the words: 'between us and you there is *a great gulf fixed.*'

¶ I have somewhere read of an American statesman who sinned a certain sin. On his deathbed he asked for a dictionary: he wanted, he said, to look up the word 'Remorse.' The physician told him there was no dictionary in the room. 'Take a card then,' said he, 'and write on it the word that best symbolizes my soul. Write it in large letters. Underscore it—the word Remorse.' It was done as he desired, and after he had gazed upon it for a time, he handed the card again to the doctor. 'What shall I do with it?' said the puzzled physician. 'Put it in your pocket,' was the reply; 'and when I am gone, take it out and look at it, and say, "That is the soul of John Randolph."'[1]

¶ A modern poet has put the thought of the parable in a slightly different dress. A Pope dies and is interred with 'incense, solemn dirge and prayer,' but his soul, chained by the earthly desires that had ruled his life, cannot leave the clay, but is doomed to share its corruption:—

Without the Church, unburied on the ground,
There lay in rags a beggar newly dead;
Above the dust no holy priest was found,
No pious prayer was said!
But round the corpse unnumbered lovely things,
Hovering unseen by the proud passers-by,
Formed, upward, upward, upward, with bright wings,
A ladder to the sky!
'And what are ye, O beautiful?' 'We are'
Answered the cherubim, 'his deeds.'
Then his soul, sparkling sudden as a star,
Flashed from his mortal weeds,
And lightly passing tier on tier, along
The gradual pinions, vanished like a smile!
Just then swept by the solemn-visaged throng
From the apostle's pile.
'Knew ye this beggar?' 'Knew? a wretch who died
Under the curse of our good Pope, now gone!'
'Lov'd ye that Pope?' 'He was our Church's pride,
And Rome's most holy son!'
Then did I muse, such are men's judgments, blind
In scorn or love! In what unguessed-of things,
Desires or deeds—do rags and purple find
The fetters or the wings![2]

3. *The Supplement.*—At this point, it is natural to think, the parable might have ended; the lesson which Jesus intended to teach—that we should provide for the future by making friends of those who will welcome us into the world to come—has been powerfully

[1] Christina G. Rossetti.

[1] J. M. E. Ross, *The Christian Standpoint*, 137.
[2] A. Stewart, in *The Parables of Jesus*, 444.

and solemnly taught. The inhuman man is a lost soul: he enters eternity without a friend. But in point of fact the parable does not end here: there is a curious addition in which the rich man appeals to Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his five brothers, and Abraham persistently refuses. How is this connected in thought with what precedes?

The idea in the appendix or supplement to the parable, however we define it, must be one which reinforces the main lesson, not one which distracts attention from it. The way in which it is to be woven into one whole with what precedes is something like this. 'That is final,' we can imagine Jesus' hearers saying to themselves when He had finished His unfolding of the invisible situation; 'that is final; but is it fair? The rich man did not know about the unseen world. If he had seen it as clearly as he saw the wretchedness of Lazarus or his own sumptuous table he would have acted differently. He should have been more distinctly warned of the consequences of inhumanity, and so should others be.' It is to meet such thoughts as these that the parable is continued. The rich man is used only to state the objection which is sure at some time or other to present itself to every one—that the invisible world of which the parable speaks is without evidence. Men do not know about it, and if motives from it are to enter life and influence conduct, they ought to be told about it by a witness they could not doubt. 'Let some one go to them from the dead.' The great thing to notice is that Jesus treats this objection as mere trifling. What is wanted is that men should be humane; and if the Bible in their hands and Lazarus at their gate do not make them so, no revelation of the splendours of heaven or the anguish of hell will ever do it. So, at least, Jesus teaches, and so God acts. Who will venture to dispute the truth?

When we take the parable as a whole, therefore, it is not a lesson on the other world, but a lesson on humanity. In particular, it is a lesson on the opportunities which the rich have, in presence of the poor, of making friends who can welcome and bear witness to them in the world unseen.

¶ Once when he thought himself dying Sir Walter Scott called his children round his bed and said to them: 'For myself, my dears, I am unconscious of ever having done any man an injury, *or omitted any fair opportunity of doing any man a benefit.*'

Lazarus needed the rich man, undoubtedly; but do not let us forget that the main lesson of the parable is that the rich man needed Lazarus more still.

Work for Dives

Luke xvi. 19, 20.—'There was a certain rich man. . . . There was a certain beggar.'

THE parable of Dives and Lazarus has a very much wider and larger application than we are inclined to give to it. We generally confine its teaching to the relation of those who have money and those who have not. But it is to be remembered that money is only one form of power, one form of strength, and poverty is only one kind of weakness and need. There are other kinds of strength besides money; other kinds of need besides poverty. So when the two characters are contrasted, one is regarded as the one who has and the other as one of the have-nots. Dives stands for every kind of strength: for endowment, for privilege, for capacity, for opportunity in every shape and form. Lazarus stands not merely for want of money, but for weakness, incapacity, disadvantage, want of opportunity of every shape and form. So that the outstanding relationship of the parable does not confine itself to the obligations of the rich to the poor only; it branches out till it takes in the obligations of all kinds of strength to all kinds of weakness, all kinds of power to all kinds of needs. If you are a Dives of money there is a Lazarus at your gate who needs you. If you are not rich in money but rich in accomplishments, in capacity, in opportunity, there is a Lazarus at your gate who needs you. If you are not rich in money or accomplishments, but are rich in faith, there is a Lazarus at your gate who needs you. Whatever be our strength, we are under obligations to weakness; and the character of our strength and power determines the character of our obligations. If the duty be not paid, if the obligation be not discharged, our strength here will become our torment yonder, and we shall live in the fire of remorse for an ill-used and wasted life. That seems to be the

heart of the parable, and the teaching of our Lord.

Let us look at some types of strength and their obligations to different kinds of need.

1. *The Lazarus of Poverty.*—First, there is the obligation of those who have money to those who have not. There is a very striking contrast between the way in which society is divided into sections by the world and the way in which it is divided by Christ. The world takes society and draws across it two horizontal lines, and says that all above the first line are called the Upper Classes. The second horizontal line has above it the Middle Classes, and all below the second line are called the Lower Classes. Now the strange thing is that Jesus Christ never drew a horizontal line. He takes society, and draws a vertical line throughout the whole scale, dividing society into two sections, and He speaks of the one as on the right hand, and of the other as on the left. He calls one the sheep and the other the goats. The world divides horizontally, according to money; Christ divides vertically, according to character. The world puts Dives in the upper class, Lazarus in the lower class; Christ puts Lazarus on the right hand, Dives on the left. Christ paid no homage to wealth. What He never did, He never wants His followers to do. Do homage to character, said Christ. Christ got behind the man's possessions to the man. He probed through a man's poverty, or wealth, or condition, by searching questions of this kind—How does he regard his possessions? How does he discharge his obligations to the sore need that crouches at his gate? How does he regard his wealth?

The man who says his wealth is his Father's will open wide his hands and eyes and look abroad upon God's world, and will say—My needy brethren, where are they? But there are others who, when they are enriched, are only enriched themselves. Such men hold their possessions on short tenure. Death will strip them bare as bandits strip a traveller. They will pass into the Master's presence absolutely naked. They have scorned to pay the debt which all strength owes to weakness, and in the beyond there is only one condition for them—the fire and torment of burning remorse. He who in this world lives selfishly in a palace will live outside the gate yonder.

Only they shall miss the Master's praise,
When the day closes and the shadows fall,
Who idly standing with averted gaze,
Intent on pleasure heeded not the call,
Or scorned the task because it was not great,
Or when the battle raged about the wall,
Looked coldly down and left the award to fate.

2. *The Lazarus of Vulgarity.*—All the wealth of the world is not money. Dives is always rich, but not always rich in money; Lazarus is always poor, but not always poor in money. For instance, there is a Lazarus whom, for want of a better name, we may call Lazarus the Vulgar. He was made a little lower than the angels, but somehow or other he has never got his wings loosed. He can only grope and crawl amid the mire. He who does not aspire becomes increasingly coarse, and all the worse because unconscious of it.

Who is to be responsible for giving this unprivileged Lazarus the aspiring and appreciative power he needs? Those who have the power. We have what he has not—what he has never had a chance of having. What we have—be it musical talent, refined taste, or intellectual gifts—whatever we have, it is God's wealth, and we hold it as sacred a trust as the money given by God to Dives. How many have discharged that obligation? How many have used their talents to raise these grosser brethren into the light and liberty of God?

I thought in my own secret soul, if thus
(By the strong sympathy that knits mankind)
A power untried exists in each of us,
By which a fellow-creature's wavering mind
To good or evil deeds may be inclined;
Shall not an awful questioning be made:
(And we perchance no fitting answer find:)
Whom hast *thou* sought to rescue or persuade?
Whom roused from sinful sloth? whom comforted, afraid? [1]

We shrink from the service! There is nothing that stands out in a more lurid colour in our Saviour's life than the utter surprise of the Pharisees that anyone refined should hold communion with the gross. They said, 'He eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners'; He is 'gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.' And these Pharisees drew in their

[1] Mrs Norton.

garments lest they should be defiled by contact with these people. This characteristic of the Pharisee is not extinct to-day. People have stood aside from helpful, direct, redeeming labour lest they should be defiled. But no one was ever yet defiled who went out on a saving mission to uplift his fellow men. The man who goes out to save others is safe. If the coarse can be refined by contact with the refined, who is to do it? Those who are refined. The refined are under obligations to those who are unrefined.

Love Me in sinners and in saints,
In each who needs or faints.—
Lord, I will love Thee as I can
In every brother man.

3. *The Lazarus of Despair.*—There is another Lazarus in our midst—the Lazarus of Despair. You can find such men in almost every street—men who have lost their sense of God. Life has been a passage through tumultuous waters, and their enterprises have been a series of failures; and they begin to wonder if there is a guiding, controlling, and living God. There are many such people of little faith. A Dives is wanted to help them.

How can we minister? We can do a great deal by a confession of our faith. Thomas Carlyle said that a conviction grows tremendously in power if we find it is shared by some one else. And our confession of belief to a despairing brother may prove a tonic to his despair. My soul shall make her boast in the Lord, said the Psalmist, and the result shall be that the humble shall hear thereof and be glad. They will be nerved by our assurance. Their despondency will be destroyed by the thought of our faith.

Individuality

Luke xvi. 20.—'A certain beggar named Lazarus.'

1. Why did our Lord in His parable of the rich man and Lazarus give us the name of the beggar and not the name of the rich man? Why did He speak of the rich man in vague, general terms as only a *certain* rich man; and why did He mention the name of the beggar? We should have imagined that it would have been just the reverse. When a man becomes rich in our country he becomes a somebody, but when a man is poor he is a nobody. He has no name that is known outside his own humble dwelling. That is the way of the world.

With Christ it was quite different. It was the common people, with names unknown and undistinguished lives, who gave Him His best welcome. He knew well from His own experience the 'short and simple annals of the poor,' and He could understand and sympathize with their condition. If others despised and rejected them, He would honour them for their simple virtue and rugged honesty. He would minister to their humblest necessities, and give to their sore experiences a deeper meaning and a higher value, and connect them with the blessedness of heaven.

2. But it was not merely because of our Lord's sympathy with the poor that He discriminated in this remarkable way between the rich man and Lazarus. The reason lies deeper than that, and touches the very foundations of human nature. Our Lord, by naming the one and leaving the other nameless, wished to show that it was the character and not the condition of the two men that distinguished them. The rich man was just a rich man, and nothing more. He has been called 'Dives,' but that is simply the Latin word for rich. It is not an individual but a generic name; the name of a class, not of a person. It applies to every rich man without distinction, not to one man exclusively. The individual is lost in the class. The rich man had no personal likeness, no particular name, because he had no individuality. He was simply one of many, without any personal characteristics to separate him from the class with which he was associated. His sole distinction was that he was a rich man.

¶ In many of our rapid streams there is a very slender kind of worm living, called a caddis-worm. It gathers round itself a compact case of little bits of sand and gravel and sticks and any substance that happens to float past that it can lay hold of. In this case it hides itself, and attaches itself to the bottom of the stream and resists the force of the current. This case is many times the size of its own body; and when you pull it to pieces, and reach the worm in the inside, you are surprised to find how thin and small it is; how little living material there is at the heart of all

this great mass of sand and gravel and sticks. And so it is with the rich man in the parable. It is the riches with which he is encased that swell out his life and make his petty, insignificant being bulk so largely in the eye of the community, and take such a firm hold of the world.[1]

On the other hand, the poor man must be known by his character, or not at all. He comes out of circumstances, naked, clear cut, with outlines well defined, like a figure in perfect relief, like a statue that stands on a pedestal surrounded only by the empty air, not like a cameo that is carved out of a shell or a gem, and is seen only against the background of that material. The portraits of the poor stand out, by the inequalities of fortune, against the dark background of toil and want and poverty. Their human nature is their sole possession, and its character is clearly and distinctly outlined by the hard discipline of their lot. Their poverty has made them what they are; and whatever worth or virtue their life owns has been given to them by the toils and trials through which they have passed.

3. We see in the rich man of the parable the common characteristics of a rich man. His good things were his clothing of purple and fine linen and his sumptuous fare. He valued these outward, material things above the inner, spiritual things of his true life. Even religion itself was for him chiefly a thing of outward form and show. And as these things are all outside of a man, and do not touch his real nature, so in proportion as he yields to these habits and cultivates these qualities does he lose his individuality; he gains the world, but loses his own soul; he has no name, but is known as a certain rich man. And when he dies he leaves all his possessions behind him. He is stripped of the body he has pampered and the treasures he has amassed and the forms he has worshipped, and enters into a world of spiritual and eternal realities with which he has nothing in common, and for which he has made no provision.

On the other hand, we are led to conceive of Lazarus as caring more for the soul than for the body, valuing human life as a scene of spiritual discipline and growth rather than of sensual comfort and enjoyment. And when he died the name of Lazarus,—'God is my help'—and all that it implied, was carried with him to heaven and was continued in the future life. His individuality suffered no change by the transition to the future world.

4. There is a Divine significance in a man's name. It is just himself—his true being and individuality—and depends upon what he is in himself. 'To him that overcometh,' says Christ—overcometh not merely the hostile circumstances opposed to his well-being without, but also his own easily-besetting sin, the inward lusts that war against the soul, all that in him is opposed to God's holy will and has a tendency to degrade his nature—'to him that overcometh will I give . . . a white stone, and in the stone a new name written.' The greatest word that God can speak to His children is what He said to Moses: 'I know thee by name.' To be known by name to the King of heaven is the highest glory of a spirit; it sets the spirit at once in the front rank of the universe, among the elders, whose place is nearer the throne than that of angels and archangels.

¶ The higher a creature is the more individuality it has. The nearer an animal comes to ourselves, the more it associates with us, the more it is individualized. We do not name our sheep, because they do not dwell with us, and they are a mere flock. One sheep is like another. We name our dog, because he has a character and is closely associated with us. And so the more closely we are associated with Him in whose image we were made, the more individuality we have. The Christian is truly the only man that has a name, for he only in the full sense is a man. He is lifted above the world into personal relations with God. It is only if we have Christ formed in us as the hope of glory that our true being and individuality will pass with us through death into eternal life, and Christ will confess our name before His Father and before His angels.

[1] H. Macmillan, *The Touch of God*, 193.

Brought Home

Luke xvi. 22.—'Carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.'

John xiv. 3.—'I will come again, and receive you unto myself.'

PERHAPS the greatest part of the darkness and terror of death is that all is taken out of our

hands. No earthly love can brighten that untried way to the unseen world or help to make a home in the new conditions. The departed—and this is the first bitterness of death—are indeed withdrawn from our care.

It is true we do not choose the hour of bereavement. But it is chosen. We should never think the time had come, and how darkly wise must ever seem the love that ordains it! But in the lonely and solemn moment when earthly hopes perish, the voice speaks, 'It is I; be not afraid.' The Lord Jesus has come to call His redeemed to Himself. When death is over, He receives the obedient spirit. The ministration of our love is ended; we cannot keep the departing soul company. But it is not alone. Christ is there to bring His own to the place prepared in Paradise.

1. The home to which He brings them is prepared, and by His own hands. To die is not to pass into the wide, grey, lampless, deep, unpeopled darkness. When a child is born on earth into a loving home, how much thought and affection have gone into preparation for its coming! It enters feeble and ignorant into an unknown world. But for every want there has been already a provident care. So, but far more abundantly, is there a preparation made for us in the other life.

Ever since Jesus left this world He has been preparing and receiving in the other. That He should be there is in itself a preparation. In the Father's house there are many mansions: His presence makes them homes.

How know I that it looms lovely that land I
have never seen,
With morning-glories and heartsease and unexampled green,
With neither heat nor cold in the balm-redolent air?
Some of this, not all, I know; but this is so;
Christ is there.[1]

2. Also Christ has been preparing by receiving. Long as that sweet and solemn call has sounded, 'Gather my saints together unto me,' holy souls have obeyed it, and now who of us is so poor as to have none to welcome in the other life? There, as here, the Master says, 'Love one another.' In the days of His flesh, overcome by loving pity, He brought one back and 'delivered him to his mother.' He knows His sheep by the old names and the new, and to Him every death is a birth, and every parting on earth an endless embrace in heaven.

Yes; we can do nothing. At the moment when we would fain do everything we are gently bidden back. Not now. Our opportunity was given; whether used well or ill it has ceased. The passion of grief and pity which shakes the soul avails not. Our prayers are no longer needed; they are in the full possession of all that prayer implored. We learn at last, with a wonder which may grow into praise, that our love was untender, and our care ungentle, and our sympathy imperfect, compared with the loving kindness which enfolds them now.

But the love which is the one element they breathe has not forgotten us and our immortal claim on them. Knowledge, when the fullness of the universe becomes luminous, shall vanish away. But love lives on, making homes. Christ says:

All which I took from thee I did but take
Not for thy harms,
But just that thou might'st seek it in my arms
All which thy child's mistake
Fancies as lost I have stored for thee at home;
Rise, clasp my hand, and come.[1]

When we see beyond the darkness; when we know that the soul is at home with Christ; when we can say, 'Well is our treasure laid up for us in eternity,' peace has begun.

¶ 'A king was sitting with his warriors round the fire in a long, dark barn. It was night, and winter. Suddenly a little bird flew in at the open door, and flew out again at the other. The king spoke, and said: "This bird is like man in the world; it flew in from darkness, and out again to darkness, and was not long in the warmth and light." "King," replied the oldest of the warriors, "even in the dark the bird is not lost, but finds its nest." '[2]

3. But why are we left ignorant about so much? Why is not more of the mystery lightened? Why is death so terrible in its manner? And why are we hindered from direct communion with the dead? These are

[1] Christina G. Rossetti.

[1] Francis Thompson.
[2] W. Robertson Nicoll, *Ten-Minute Sermons*, 128.

questions to which no full answer can be given. But it is possible to see that our business is to live, that God has work for us, even if for the time to come we are only able to keep pace with the wounded. If death were robbed of its terrors—if it were, as it might have been, the crowning joy of life—how could men go on living, working, waiting? It is good for us that Paradise, according to the deep Eastern saying, should still lie under the shadow of swords.

And if the communion could be resumed, the whole heart would be drawn away from the present life and its duties. Because He means us to abide for a season, the sweet voices are still. Yet He remains, and in Him there is union with those lost awhile.

The Peril of Inattention

Luke xvi. 23.—'In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments.'

THERE is a well-known picture by Gustave Doré which portrays this parable of the rich man and the beggar. We are shown the rich man in the midst of Oriental luxury, and at the foot of the marble steps the diseased Lazarus. So far the picture is worthy of the genius, for it is vivid and full of rich imagination; but Doré has introduced one other feature which shows that he has misread the Saviour's story. Over the beggar an Eastern slave is bending with a scourge of twigs in his uplifted hand. He has been bidden drive Lazarus away, for his misery is as a death's-head at the feast. Doré is wrong in introducing that, for our Lord does not hint that Dives was disturbed—he was not consciously and deliberately cruel; he was only totally and hopelessly indifferent.

The attitude of innumerable people towards the great questions of the religious life is just the inattentive attitude of the rich man to Lazarus at his gate. There was a time when unbelief was militant, and when men were in arms against the cause of Christ; a time when Voltaire could write, 'Scratch out the Infamous,' and the Infamous was the Redeemer of the world. But we find few militant atheists to-day—they are like voices crying in the wilderness; what we *do* find is something far more deadly, it is that height of insult which we call indifference. Many are simply inattentive to Christ's claims, and spend their days in utter unconcern, disregarding His presence as completely as Dives disregarded that of Lazarus.

When Jesus came to Golgotha, they hanged
Him on a tree;
They drave great nails through hands and feet,
and made a Calvary;
They crowned Him with a crown of thorns, red
were His wounds and deep,
For those were crude and cruel days, and human
flesh was cheap.

When Jesus came to Birmingham, they simply
passed Him by;
They never hurt a hair of Him, they only let
Him die;
For men had grown more tender, and they
would not give Him pain;
They only just passed down the street, and left
Him in the rain.

Still Jesus cried 'Forgive them, for they know
not what they do,'
And still it rained the winter rain that drenched
Him through and through;
The crowds went home and left the streets
without a soul to see,
And Jesus crouched against the wall, and cried
for Calvary.[1]

1. *Some Dangers of Inattention.*—How perilous the inattentive spirit is we have only to open our eyes to see. It is one of the lessons that reach us every day as we walk through the crowded streets of a great city. Readers of Marcus Aurelius will remember how he bases the art of life upon attention. In the jostle and pressure of a modern city that truth has a very literal significance. For a man who lives in Glasgow or in London to move inattentive amid the rush of traffic is to augment by a thousand-fold the perils that are inevitable where life is swift and full. Not a day passes but in the city of London some one is maimed through being inattentive. One might put it in an even grimmer fashion, for every day in the streets some one is killed. Now all that happens not where life is meagre, but where life is rich, and tumultuous, and full. Nowhere is it so perilous to be indifferent as within the

[1] G. A. Studdert-Kennedy.

sweep of mighty tides of life. And if the life that is revealed in Christ is mightier in its flow than that of Babylon, do we not feel the risks of inattention when that life is at our very door?

Again, we might throw light upon the matter by considering the common laws of health. There are certain principles with which we are all familiar, and to which we give the name of laws of health. They are written upon the framework of our bodies; they are not many, nor are they hard to keep; but they are as certainly the laws of God as any commandment graven in the Decalogue. Now we never meet a man who hates these laws, or breaks them in a spirit of rebellion. But we meet many who are inattentive, and who constantly and recklessly neglect them. We do not need to defy the laws of health to have the body taking vengeance on us. The body avenges far more than defiance; it inevitably avenges inattention. Many a man yet living is in hell, and lifts up his eyes towards heaven being in torments; and at the back of all his torments is not vice, but a persistent and foolish disregard. If that is true, then, of the body, is it incredible that it should hold true of the soul? Are we certain to escape in spiritual things for a line of action that never escapes in physical? On the contrary, the higher that we rise, the more are we likely to suffer for neglect, just because the interests involved are of such tremendous and eternal consequence.

2. *Some Causes of Inattention.*—(1) Perhaps the commonest cause is *custom.* Some one has said that if all the stars ceased shining, and then after a hundred years shone out again, there is not an eye but would be lifted heavenward, and not a lip but would break forth in praise. But the stars were shining when we were little children, and they are there to-night, and will be there to-morrow, and we are so accustomed to that glory that we rarely give to it a single thought.

¶ Mablethorpe, as Francis Thompson tells us, was Tennyson's favourite retreat. It was the bourne to which his feet turned whenever there was a question of a holiday, and it became so idealized in his mind that for ever after it was a standard of grandeur by which he tried all seas. But the inhabitants of the place were always puzzled to discover what it was that fascinated him. 'I used to stand on the sand-built ridge and think it was the spine-bone of the world,' Tennyson exclaims. But the old fisherman on the beach could make neither head nor tail of it. He could not imagine why the crowds swarmed down to his quiet home as soon as summer came. 'Nottingham and Lincoln foalk moastly coom 'ere,' the old man told the poet, 'a vast sight of 'em soom taime; and the wind blaws the poor things a bit, and they weshes their bodies in the waaves!'[1]

It is a bad thing to grow accustomed to the wrong. It may be worse to grow accustomed to the right. And that is why in the history of the Church God sends the earthquake and the crash of storm, that men may be roused and startled to concern, and escape the fatal sway of inattention.

(2) Another cause of inattention is *a lowered vitality.* When we are weary, and the flame of life is low, somehow we can neither grasp nor grip. Everything becomes formless and elusive. We read, and hardly understand the page; we work, yet seem to master nothing. Then comes the morning, it may be in the springtime, when the life within us is strong and full again. And at once, in that renewed vitality, we grow alert, attentive, able to grasp and grip; not a page but is radiant with meaning now, not a thing but has a thought behind it. 'I am come to give abundant life,' says Christ, and to give it here and now, and not to-morrow. It is in that life which may be ours now that we can seize with an attentive faith the things that are unseen and eternal.

(3) But the deepest cause of inattention is still to seek. The deepest cause of it is *lack of love.* Let a man once love a book, a land, a woman, and he will never be inattentive any more. When a young man is paying court to somebody, do not the people say 'he is paying her attention'? Love and attention, in the people's speech, have practically the same signification. It was love that made the father of the prodigal so quick to discern the figure of his son. It was love that made our Saviour give such heed to the cry of the blind beggar by the road. And it is love to Christ which wakens the dulled heart not only to the things that are unseen, but to the infinite value of the soul that is lodged under the raggedness of Lazarus.

[1] F. W. Boreham, *The Golden Milestone*, 112.

The Survival of Memory

Luke xvi. 25.—'Son, remember.'

It is said that in Moldavia, when a peasant recovers from some terrible and nearly fatal illness, all his friends gather round his bed to ask him what he has seen of the other world, and what news he can give them of their dead kinsfolk. Such a curiosity is natural and justified. We may remember that Tennyson, in his *In Memoriam*, makes Martha and Mary ask the same question of the risen Lazarus:

'Where wert thou, brother, those four days?'
There lives no record of reply,
Which telling what it is to die
Had surely added praise to praise.

Such a curiosity is natural, simply because the conviction of some conscious life beyond death is universal. The farther back you push your inquiries into the primitive religious thoughts of men, the more overwhelming becomes the evidence of a steady conviction on the part of man that he is a creature possessed of a double life. That the body dies, he knows too well; but that there is something about him that does not die, he is convinced. How far does Christ enlarge and define this conviction? To this question it may be said that the whole teaching of Christ affords an answer. Around all His teaching there is the perspective of the infinite. Whether He speaks definitely of eternity or not, He made men feel that human life was nothing without it. He Himself spoke as one who could cross at will the frontier of that undiscovered land, who knew it familiarly, and made no effort to affirm it, because it was a thing too certain to be in need of argument.

But it is not the bare and vague affirmation of an after life which man wants; he naturally asks for details. Does Christ help us here? It must be conceded that He says relatively little. Nor is it difficult to explain this silence of our Lord, when we remember two things: first, that His supreme object was to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, and that object would have been defeated if too great stress had been laid upon the after life. And, second, that man could not bear a detailed revelation of the after life, because he would immediately degrade and corrupt it by the grossness of his own mind, and the bluntness of his imagination. Are not the common pictures of heaven presented to us in our childhood all grossly materialistic?

¶ I remember how in childhood I would sometimes look out of the window on a dark night, and wonder with childish terror what I should do if the Last Advent were suddenly to set the sky aflame and the elements to melt with fervent heat. And perhaps all the childishness of human views of the judgment is not left behind with childhood. Sir Thomas Browne is sane and wise when he says, 'I cannot dream that there should be at the last day any such judicial proceeding, or calling to the bar, as indeed the Scripture seems to imply, and the literal commentators do conceive; for unspeakable mysteries in the Scriptures are often delivered in a vulgar and illustrative way, and, being written unto man, are delivered, not as they truly are, but as they may be understood.'[1]

Now turn to this section of the parable which presents Dives to us as a citizen of the after life. He has passed beyond the veil. His earthly life is all concluded; the place that knew him knows him no more for ever; the house is swept and garnished, and under its familiar roof his brethren sit and feast as in the days when he was with them. He will sit no more with them; on him the immense surprise of eternity has broken. What, then, has Dives taken with him into this after life which makes him still Dives? The answer is given in the words of Abraham, 'Son, remember.' He can remember, then, he does remember, and that is to say he is still himself. Whatever change has happened to him, his own identity is untouched. He is still Dives; and when Abraham credits him with the power of memory, he asserts that in virtue of memory personal identity survives death.

1. *Memory is judgment.*—'Son, remember'; what sort of act is it to which Abraham invites Dives when he utters these words? It is an act of moral discrimination, or of judgment. He tells him to scrutinize his earthly life, to weigh and measure it in all its motives and in

[1] J. M. E. Ross, *The Self-Portraiture of Jesus*, 57.

all its effects; to judge himself, in fact, and to declare whether things could be otherwise with him than they are. We have most of us imbibed in our early religious thoughts notions of a Judgment Day which are not only erroneous but in part absurd. No doubt the Scriptures do speak of a Judgment Day, a fixed point of time when God's moral purposes with men will have run their course, a final winding up and settlement of all human affairs. That is credible enough; nay, it is inevitable. What is incredible is that all the dead generations have to wait for that great assize, and the Scriptures nowhere teach this. If we take this story of Dives as the clue to the future, we see that no sooner is the rich man dead than his spirit is in hell; his judgment is instantaneous, and it is silent. Who, then, is his judge? Memory. Who is his accuser? Memory. To remember is to be judged. To look through the past of human life, and see no kindly deed, no record of a generous sentiment or a noble impulse, to see how selfishness hardened into callousness, and parsimony deepened into avarice, and the desire of pleasure into sensualism; to mark moral deterioration at every step, to see hopes relinquished, ideals forsaken, and opportunities missed; to see these things not as isolated facts, but in their true sequence —that is to be judged.

¶ The old Greek legend spoke of Lethe, the river in Hades, one draught of which could wash away all thought of a man's past. But no such water of oblivion is promised in the Christian Gospel. There may await us, rather, the very opposite of Lethe. When the characters in an ancient manuscript have grown dim with age, its lines are sometimes touched with a chemical solution which revives the faded letters into their pristine clearness. So it may be with the defaced manuscripts of the human soul. The river of death will wash out, not our memory, but only our forgetfulness.[1]

2. *Memory is hell.*—This is the torment of Dives—he remembers. If Christ uses the symbols of the flame, and the blistered tongue, and the cry for water, recollect that they are but symbols, they are the temporary picture; the fact of memory is the eternal principle.

[1] T. H. Darlow, *At Home in the Bible*, 318.

I'll tell thee what is Hell—thy memory
Still mountained up with records of the past,
Heap over heap, all accents and all forms,
The best occasions trifled o'er or spurned;
All that hath been that ought not to have been,
That might have been so different, that now
Cannot but be irrevocably past.
Thy gangrened heart,
Stripped of its self-worn mask, and spread at last
Bare in its horrible anatomy,
Before thy own excruciated gaze.

It was one of the profound thoughts of De Quincey that when it is said that the books are opened on the Judgment Day, what is meant is the books of the individual memory. At some given signal, as in some vast and solemn theatre, the curtain is rolled up, and all a man's life enacts itself before him on the stage—the pageant of his hopes and fears, the procession of his good and evil acts, the secret thing made known, the whispered thought re-uttered—the whole drama of a career compressed into a moment. That is precisely what Christ represents as happening to Dives in another world. He remembered. And because this is so, we cannot but hear in that solemn voice which cries 'Son, remember' a voice of warning for this life, too. It is as though Christ said to each of us: O judge yourself that ye be not judged; be careful how you live, for memory forgets nothing; live so that memory may be your heaven and not your hell.

The Great Separation

Luke xvi. 26.—'Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed.'

When our Lord desired to put before us what we may describe as the worst and most disastrous result of wrongdoing, He put it in the form of a sad separation. In His stories He told us that what came as the climax when men had not lived up to their opportunities, was that the voice of Divine love was heard saying, 'Depart.' It was the word of separation. In the same way, when He drew the picture of those unwise virgins whose lamps were going out at the critical moment when

the bridegroom came, the climax of the story lay in the words, 'And the door was shut.'

Have we not heard the bridegroom is so sweet?
O let us in, tho' late, to kiss His feet!
No, no, too late! ye cannot enter now.

Now one thing which has caused great difficulty in the interpretation of this and other parables of Christ is the persistent literalism which some minds bring to the interpretation. When you speak of the 'great gulf fixed,' they cannot escape from the idea of geographical distance. They think of a vast, yawning, rocky gorge, which stands between heaven and the nethermost pit. And they think of it only from the standpoint of the final and the literal construction.

But Jesus is always an emphatic declarer of spiritual ideas. 'The kingdom of heaven,' He said, 'is within.' The whole significance of the drama and tragedy of the soul is to be sought not in any external environment, but in the spiritual condition of the man. And here, then, the picture is of the man within, as it were, reaching to view the things which are now to his mind truly desirable, but which, he is conscious, are absolutely outside his grasp. The heights of joy which once might have been his are inaccessible to him, and the gulf is so vast that even his need cannot pass over it, nor can the charity of the other world overleap it.

1. If we take this as a picture of spiritual separation our first thought is, What was the secret cause? What was Dives' fault? What is it that we can find to blame in his life?

No charge of positive sin is brought against this rich man. There is no suggestion that he obtained his money by any but honest means, or that he spent it in illicit ways. What is wrong, then? His whole attitude to life is wrong. The picture of Dives is that of a man who is useless to society, profitless to the Divine Being who put him into the world and absolutely profitless to himself also.

(1) *He was profitless to society.*—For what is it that constitutes real service to society? Not that we can show a measure of ordinary and conventional hospitality, but that we can so order and direct our lives as to contribute some real value, some helpful purpose, to the lives of others. God did not put us into the world to look upon our neighbours as only opportunities for exercising a little bit of pride in the generosity of our own hospitality. He put us into this world to be of definite use and service to our fellow-men.

¶ In the Mosaic Law, as Sir John Seeley has pointed out, condemnation always fell upon the man who had sinned—who had done something he ought not to have done. But in Christ's parables it is the man who has left undone what he ought to have done who is condemned. 'The sinner whom Christ habitually denounces is he who has done nothing. This character comes repeatedly forward in His parables. It is the priest and Levite who passed by on the other side. It is Dives, of whom no ill is recorded except that a beggar lay at his gate full of sores and yet no man gave unto him. It is the servant who hid in a napkin the talent committed to him. It is the unprofitable servant, who has only done what it was his duty to do.' [1]

The sin of Dives did not lie in the fact that he was vicious, but in the fact that the appeal of Lazarus at his door made no impression upon his soul. Thus he was a man profitless to society, which was continually at his gate, but found no entrance into the man's heart.

¶ In Mr Studdert-Kennedy's latest book there is this striking little poem on a self-seeking and self-centred man:

I would buy me a perfect island home,
Sweet set in a southern sea,
And there would I build me a paradise
For the heart o' my Love and me.

I would plant me a perfect garden there,
The one that my dream soul knows,
And the years would flow as the petals grow,
That flame to a perfect rose.

I would build me a perfect temple there,
A shrine where my Christ might dwell,
And then would I wake to behold my soul
Damned deep in a perfect Hell.[2]

(2) *He was profitless to God.*—For what does God put us into this world for if He does not deal with us as we deal with the commodities

[1] *Ecce Homo*, 176.
[2] *Lighten Our Darkness*, 39.

of the earth? Jesus Christ constantly said that the very purpose for which the husbandman planted the tree was that the tree should bring forth fruit. And if the picture given is of a tree that bears no fruit, the wise husbandman says, 'To what purpose is this tree occupying ground which might be occupied by a fruit-bearing tree? Cut it down. Why cumbereth it the ground?' God expects return for His great and wonderful investment in us, with our capacities, with our powers of affection, with our powers of will, with our moral sense, with our imagination, with our intellectual powers of observation, with the continued use of the opportunities daily put round about us. So from the standpoint of what we may describe as the Divine economy the man was also profitless.

(3) *He was profitless to himself.*—We are not put into the world simply that we may go out of it just as we came into it. Every opportunity of life that comes to us in the possession of means or the possession of power or the possession of some intellectual gift is put into our hands that we may turn it to some account, so that it may react upon ourselves and send us out of this world with a character disciplined, ennobled, purified, by the action of the various adversities and prosperities of life. But this man was doing nothing. The whole picture of his life is that of a circumscribed indolence that has no idea of ever moving out into any energetic action. It is exactly one of those negative lives that give way to the inertia of the moment, take, as we say, the line of least resistance, and remain therefore profitless to themselves; stunted, starved characters that have not ever learned how to grow.

2. If we neglect our powers they will perish through want of use. The heart and conscience may wither and the range of our imaginative powers and our intellectual forces may also wither, the power of reverence for what is higher, the power and the sense of love for what is right, the power of tender affection—all these may wither away if they are neglected. We do not drop into this state of things, separated from all that is high and noble and good, all of a moment. These things come to pass—and that is the tragedy of it—these things come to pass by slow degrees.

We need to stand in perpetual guard against those subtle influences which are stealing away from our hearts and minds the very best possessions that we have. If, for instance, a man in his early life has been full of a reverent view of life and of God and of Nature, and by degrees, perhaps only through the influence of the many affairs of life which occupy his mind, he has come to look upon the world and no longer feel that there is a great and imposing reverence about the fact that he is alive in this wonderful universe of God's creation; if he does not feel that sunshine and storm and cloud and the powers of Nature are as it were always shouting to him the song of reverence toward the Creator of all things, then, at last, the mere capacity of looking with reverence upon anything passes from this man.

Or take the moral sense. When we were young we would have said that this was an impossible picture. If we heard of some atrocity our blood boiled and indignant words left our mouth. But now we check the violent eruptions, as we call them, of youth, and say gently, 'Well, there may be other sides to the picture.' And so, by degrees, we wean ourselves from that high, hot, holy indignation against moral wrong, and we fall into a state of moral and of spiritual degradation.

Sing me a song of a lad that is gone,
Say, could that lad be I?
Merry of soul he sailed on a day
Over the sea to Skye.

Give me again all that was there,
Give me the sun that shone!
Give me the eyes, give me the soul,
Give me the lad that's gone!

Sing me a song of a lad that is gone,
Say, could that lad be I?
Merry of soul he sailed on a day
Over the sea to Skye.

Billow and breeze, islands and seas,
Mountains of rain and sun,
All that was good, all that was fair,
All that was me is gone.[1]

3. What is the worst side of it? The worst side of it all is this: that men may sin away

[1] R. L. Stevenson.

the very capacity even to desire the thing that they know, according to all moral and spiritual standpoints, ought to be desired—for instance, when men have been surrounded by some great pressure of circumstances and have longed to be able to pray. In Shakespeare's great play, the tragedy of the king of Denmark lay in this, that he knew quite well what to pray for; words were not wanting, thoughts were not wanting; but in his soul he knew that he did not wish for the thing that he knew he ought to pray for, because he had killed out the power of a better and a more splendid affection and aspiration. And this is the danger against which Christ warns us—that we kill out the noble aspirations in us. All insensibly they will get worn and withered away, and we find ourselves in such a state that we cannot even wish for the good which we know is absolutely essential to our happiness.

The Five Brothers

Luke xvi. 28.—'For I have five brethren.'

Dives is greatly distressed for his five brethren who are yet alive, lest they should come to be where he is. He trembles for their destiny, when the last angel comes for them. He wants Abraham to send Lazarus back to life to warn them. A significant request that, for all professed teachers and preachers of religion to ponder! Dives is afraid that if his brothers are left to them they will fare no better than he has done. The indictment, serious as it is, would be insupportable but for the defence that Abraham makes. 'Your brothers,' he says, 'have Moses and the prophets.' They have the Word of God in which the Way of Life is clearly showed forth. They can read it for themselves. It is an effective answer for those who make the shortcomings of professedly religious people—which are both numerous and great—an excuse for neglecting the vital interest of personal religion. You have Moses and the prophets, says Abraham, you have the Bible, and you can read it for yourselves.

It is Jesus who is speaking, remember. He is telling the story, and putting the words into Abraham's mouth. The voice is the voice of Abraham but the thoughts are the thoughts of Jesus Christ. This is *His* thought about the Bible, even the half-Bible that was all there was in His day! He says, in effect, that that book is sufficient for the five brethren. If they give heed to its teaching, Dives need not fear that they will come beside him. What an honour, and what an emphasis Jesus Christ puts upon the Bible!

¶ Some one has said that everywhere in the Bible, if we dig deep enough, we find 'Do right' at the bottom. Yet, while this is true, it is far from being the total truth. For if we dig deeper still, we find each exhortation to right conduct based on the rock of the righteousness of God. While St Paul lays down in detail the plain practical duties of daily life, he constantly grounds these duties on supernatural facts and enforces them by transcendent motives. For instance, in the Epistle to the Romans, when he has ended his mighty argument concerning the sovereign grace of God, the Apostle begins to draw the cords of Divine love closer round the conscience of the individual man. 'I beseech you, *therefore*, brethren'—at the back of that word *therefore* lies the whole weight of Christian theology. Considering the wonder and glory of our election and redemption, what manner of persons ought we to be? There is no other basis for ethics in the New Testament. The golden precepts of conduct given there depend upon heavenly sanctions and succours; they are the rules for a redeemed life which is surrendered to the will of God.[1]

May we not say, then, that our Lord's judgment on what we call the ordinary means of grace—the Bible, the Church, and prayer—should be sufficient for any man? These are enough for the sustenance of the religious life. What a serious attitude to take to those things which even Christian people regard somewhat lightly! It was not by the discourse of angel ministrants that Jesus, as a rule, sustained His own soul, but by His reading and study of the Scriptures, by prayer, and by the services of the sanctuary.

Christ recognized that common meeting house,
Would choose to turn from nature's choicest
place
And, 'as His custom was, He went.' So I,
No wiser than my Lord, will go there too
And, listening to His word, receive His grace.[2]

¶ 'A little meeting house,' says Fosdick, 'is

[1] T. H. Darlow, *At Home in the Bible*, 30.
[2] Winifred M. Crossley.

still standing in a country town to which my memory makes frequent pilgrimage. It was a small dilapidated structure when I was a boy; it never has been rich or prosperous; it preached a theology which I do not now believe, and insisted on denominational peculiarities in which I have not now the slightest interest. But one day in a pew of that church, I as a boy caught a glimpse of the vision glorious.' [1]

How few of us realize what heavenly treasure is hid for us in these ordinary means of grace. There have been times when we longed for some sudden flowering of the soul-life within us, some rising of the tides of the Spirit on which we should be floated to higher levels of effort and desire. If something like that happened to us, we imagine, our religious life would cease to be the haphazard, intermittent thing it is. We should be in dead earnest then. We should really follow the Christ then, and walk more worthy of our high vocation. We want, in fact, something or somebody to shock us, to frighten or compel us to a closer and more real walk with God. Christ here deals with such a longing, which is not the Rich Man's only. He points us away from the startling, the wonderful, the catastrophic, to those humble ordinary means which we already know so well, and often esteem so lightly—to the old Book, with all its inspiration and help for right living, to the pew in God's House, where He has a special tryst to meet us, and where some of us keep our tryst just once in a while, to the quiet prayer, when we are alone with God and our true self. It is there we shall get what we need. For those who are unwilling to use these, no miracle, says Jesus, would avail. There can be no staggering revelation, no uplifting vision for those who have Moses and the prophets, and do not use them.

The only worthy conclusion to a solemn story like this is a new resolve regarding the use we make of God's Word, and our loyalty to His worship, and the privilege of prayer. Surely we can all see the Master, with warning finger, pointing us back to these things. 'Ye have Moses and the prophets.' So we have. Thank God we have. And it is not too late yet for all of us, brothers of Dives, to use them as Christ would have us do.[2]

[1] *Twelve Tests of Character*, 67.
[2] Archibald Alexander, *The Stuff of Life*, 182.

The Seat of Authority

Luke xvi. 31.—'And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rise from the dead.'

We have all, at some time, wished that the spiritual world were more manifest—in fact, that it were quite visible. We have wondered, sometimes regretted, that God should maintain His silence. If, in the course of history, God would only at times reveal Himself, if He would *appear* in some almost tangible form so that His enemies and deniers should be confounded and believers comforted and assured, how much would be gained!

But the seeing of God is only by faith, the vision comes only to those who for one reason and another are looking for it, believing firmly that it may be given them. It is within the soul, and not outside of us, that the secret faith is kindled in the power of which we go out one by one to wrestle with the contradictions of the world. 'The kingdom of God cometh not with observation, neither do men say, Lo here! or, lo there! for the kingdom of God is within you.' There is no single fact in history which at a glance will convince men of God. The things of God are foolishness to the natural man; they are spiritually discerned. No man can hail Jesus as Lord except by the Holy Ghost. A trifling Frenchman once said that he had searched the heavens with a telescope and had found no God. But if he goes on to conclude that therefore—because he cannot see God with a telescope—God is not, he ought for the same reason to deny existence to every great and moving force in life. He ought to deny that there is such a thing as honour, or virtue, or love.

At every stage of spiritual life this is the law: the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him.

That Thou art nowhere to be found, agree
Wise men, whose eyes are but for surfaces;
Men with eyes opened by the second birth,
To whom the seen, husk of the unseen is,
Descry the soul of everything on earth.
Who knows Thy ends, Thy means and motions see;
Eyes made for glory soon discover Thee.

Things mean quite differently to those who differ. In the case of one who believes firmly in God, sorrow, difficulty, death—these things that challenge—only send him more eagerly back upon his faith. They mean God. As for another, who denies God, these contrary things only confirm his disbelief. They are only so many more proofs of the heartlessness and insanity of all things.

That is the burden of a very serious story which our Lord once upon a time told with great deliberateness, and notably is it the burden of the words with which the story ended: 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead.' There are two things involved in our Lord's words there and then. He seems to say that outward events have no power in themselves to produce faith. And He insists that there is something already within every heart which ought to be a sign to the man—for it is a sign—of God.

1. Outward events have no power in themselves to produce faith. There are many who think that if only some unmistakable evidence of God were to be brought before them they would forthwith become religious people. That is an error, said Jesus. An outward event may startle a man, but it will not change his life. It will change his life only if it awakens, rouses up, something within him which until that moment was asleep. The outward event will impress him in a Godward way only in so far as it is a sign of God. But how can a man discriminate and say of some event that it is a sign of God, unless the man has already in his heart some sense of God? Before you can name the wind, and say whether it is a fair wind or a head wind, whether it is favourable or contrary, you must have fixed your course and know where you are going. Only one who has already resolved upon God has the right to say of any event that to him it was a sign from God.

Let us suppose, however, that there is one who says to himself, 'If such and such a thing happens, I shall believe in God'; and suppose, then, that the very thing happens to this man which, he pledged himself, would turn him into a believer, there is no reason for being sure that this will happen. Probably it will not happen. The strangeness of the event will soon pass away. He will begin to ask himself whether he had not been too hasty in making such a resolution. He will begin to say, 'Why, this is superstition!' And at last he recovers from his fright and settles down to his old ways. But, in any case, the kind of faith in God which is produced by an outward event only is—at that stage—of no value at all. The only faith in Himself which can be pleasing to God is that a man have such a desire for goodness, such a horror of evil, as searches his life like fire, and urges him to cling to God and to sing His praise.

2. These words of our Lord, which assure us that outward events cannot of themselves produce faith, indicate at the same time that there are signs from God within our hearts to which we ought *now* to pay heed: 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets'; 'they have Moses and the prophets.' The movements of God's Spirit within us—in our conscience—are such signs. God has not left Himself without a witness in any heart. If a man leaves out his conscience, he may be able to raise a great many difficulties in the way of faith; but if a man is loyal to his conscience, he will say that ten thousand of such difficulties would never justify him in a moment's doubt of God.

We have that voice of God speaking with us, feebly it may be, like the knocking at a door when we ourselves are making a noise within. But at times, when for reasons of our own we are quiet, we hear that voice distinctly, like a knock at our door late at night.

¶ 'There are men,' says a great American writer, 'who ask vaguely where He is who spoke once as never man spake, and since has governed the centuries. Where is He whose pierced right hand lifted heathenism off its hinges and turned into another channel the dolorous and accursed ages?' And his answer is that 'at this miraculous hour the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world *is*, not *was*. This light has its temple in conscience.' 'Conscience,' declares the old Greek poet Menander, 'is a God for all of us.' We carry God about within us.

Nothing will ever appeal to us with a more distinct and personal call than that private voice of God which you hear at moments of your life; that voice which comforts you when you do good from the heart, which threatens

you when you go contrary to what you know was God's will; that voice which never fails to direct you when you bring yourself, however imperfectly, within the influence of Jesus Christ.

'The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God.' [1]

The Importance of the Usual

Luke xvi. 31.—'If they hear not Moses and the prophets.'

THERE is no difficulty in grasping the thought that was working in the mind of Jesus. It is the thought that when usual methods fail, unusual methods are not likely to succeed. The rich man in torment is pictured as praying to Abraham that a messenger might be sent from the dead to his five brothers if so be they might be spared this hell. But Abraham answered that it would be a useless ministry. 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.' And Jesus means that where the usual failed, where men have ceased to feel the deep significance of present and common and customary ministries, no startling of any ghostly voice, nor any alarm of spectral apparition is likely to change character permanently.

Our Lord frequently puts the accent of His teaching on the usual. In the next chapter we have a case in point. It was when the Pharisees asked when the Kingdom of God should come. They thought it was coming with the noise of trumpet, with the sound of marching, perhaps with the din of thunder. And Jesus answered, 'The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.' It was Jesus discounting—so to speak—the marvellous, and laying the stress upon the usual.

1. There can be no question that it is one of our commonest errors to give an undue place to the unusual. We are all eyes for the wonders of the cataract, but we neglect the long quiet reaches of the river. In everything uncommon there lies a power of arrest. It appeals to our fears; it helps to break monotony; perhaps it touches us with the sweet sense of mystery, till the appeal of it turns into a craving, and the true proportions of noble life are lost. No man can live well who has lost the Christ-sense of what the usual means. It matters little if miracles have ceased if the whole universe is a miracle. Heaven, hell, death, love, and all the mysteries—find them within a stonesthrow of your door!

In the old world this too familiar error of laying the chief stress on the unusual was seen at its height in the art of divination. It is indeed very difficult for us to realize the important part that the diviner played in paganism. He was consulted before every campaign. He had to indicate the best hour for battle. No step was taken, no great change was made, without the diviner telling if all looked propitious. And the whole science and skill of the diviner lay in interpreting signs that were extraordinary. The flight of birds, the way they ate their corn, the quivering of the leaves upon the tree, the chatterings and ravings of the maniac—it was such things that stopped the Roman legions; it was such things that cheered them on to battle. It was in the strange, it was in the accidental, it was in the extraordinary, however trifling, that the old pagan found the will of God.

In our modern world—though the diviner is long discredited—that is one great danger of the newspaper. It lays such an exaggerated stress upon everything startling, that the worth and meaning of the usual is forgotten. Let some young fool who has millions to his credit gamble away a fortune in an hour, and every newspaper in Britain will report it; but thousands of citizens are spending well and wisely—in helpful charity, in educating their children—and we do not look for this in the newspaper. If any drunken husband beats his wife, we shall read all about it in the papers; but thousands of homes are very happy, the children are romping and the wives are singing, yet we shall hear nothing of all that. And it is the failure to remember this, that makes the pessimist. The pessimist is the prophet of the unusual. The Christian shuts his eyes to none of it—it has its place, its dark place, in the world; but he has learned from Christ something of life's proportion; he knows that the usual is filled with God.

2. Again, we all need to observe the deep

[1] J. A. Hutton, *Loyalty: The Approach to Faith*, 111.

significance of the usual in revealing character. It is not the rare event, the unexpected crisis, that is the surest touchstone of a life. It is the management of ordinary days. It is the fulfilment of the usual task. Some one has said that we should avoid judging anybody by a single action, but if ever we are compelled to do it, let the action be a quite ordinary one. It is likelier that the character will be revealed in that than in some rare moment of intensity. Is he a Christian? one asked once of another. How do I know? was the reply, I never saw him at home.

¶ The workshop of character is everyday life. The uneventful and commonplace hour is where the battle is won or lost. Thank God for a new truth, a beautiful idea, a glowing experience; but remember that unless we bring it down to the ground and teach it to walk with feet, work with hands, and stand the strain of daily life, we have worse than lost it, we have been hurt by it. A new light in our heart makes an occasion; but an occasion is an opportunity, not for building a tabernacle and feeling thankful and looking back to a blessed memory, but for shedding the new light on the old path, and doing old duties with new inspiration. The uncommon life is the child of the common day, lived in an uncommon way.[1]

¶ You remember how George Eliot sums up the character of Dorothea: 'Her finely-touched spirit had still its fine issues, though they were not widely visible. Her full nature, like that river of which Cyrus broke the strength, spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.'[2]

No one can read our master novelists without noticing that they bring in the startling with a sparing hand. The weaker sort must drag in crime and murder. There is hardly a chapter without violence or alarm. But the consummate masters never degrade things so. How leisurely they are! How quiet and easy! How they will take some common day or incident and work it out into a chapter! Until, through a score of chapters such as that, somehow the characters begin to breathe. We love them; they become our intimates; if we met them to-morrow we should recognize them.

3. In the world of Nature it is the usual that most truly reveals God. Science has taught us that. Had you asked a Jew where he found God in Nature, he would have said, 'In the storm and in the thunderbolt.' And away in the heart of Africa to-night a meteor or a comet would drive a tribe half mad; but they have never dreamed of finding the Divine in the coming of summer or the springing of flowers.

Now it may be that, having lost that feeling,—that sense of the immediate touch of the Creator—the presence of God is not so keenly felt in the whistling wind or amid the clash of elements. But if God is not in the whirlwind or the fire, it is an infinite gain that by the toil of science we have wakened at last to hear the still small voice. We find Him now in the great laws of Nature. We find Him in Nature's uniformity. We find Him in that great force that binds the stars, yet keeps the tiniest atom in its place. In every springtime, with its cloak of green; in every flower that buds, in every bird that sings; in every day that breaks and night that falls, we trace the action of Divine intelligence. The sun in its course teaches us more of God than it taught the Jew when it stood still in Ajalon. Once, men saw God in the unusual in Nature. It is in the usual that we see God now.

So we come back to where we started from—the prayer to send a messenger from the dead. Let no one wait for that unusual messenger. The usual is the significant, the Divine. Attend to the usual appeals of God. There may never come the unusual call you wait for. Live at your highest in your usual duty. The common messages will become rich that way. The common tasks will become kingly. It will be better and easier every year to live. And it will be far easier to die.[1]

[1] M. D. Babcock, *Thoughts for Every-Day Living*, 93.
[2] *Middlemarch.*

[1] G. H. Morrison, *The Gentle Art of Making Happy*, 20.

The Seal of the Revelation

Luke xvi. 31.—'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.'

Easter is the seal of the revelation of God in Christ. If all had ended on the Cross, our hearts and consciences would still say that the life of Christ was the noblest achievement of mankind; we should still feel that if anything be Divine, it must be this. As we turned to the actual world—the animal world, where fear and hunger are the governing forces, the world of men, where greed and self-interest seem to rule, the world of sordid poverty and careless wealth—we should say: 'Yes; if anything is divine it must be Christ; but it is incredible that the world we live in is governed by His Spirit. If Christ were God, these things would not happen.' But the Cross was not the end. We shall gain little or nothing by careful inquiry into the actual events of the first Easter Day. The main fact is plain; the Apostles were aware of the actual presence of the living Christ among them, and because of that became the founders of the Church.

And yet even this supreme event could never be itself the basis of our religious life. If we have already felt the magic of Christ's power and charm, we accept the Resurrection as clinching what we long to believe. But if we have not felt that power and charm, the miracle of Easter can create no faith worth having. It is the moral and spiritual character of Christ and His teaching to which we must first respond. 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rise from the dead.'

¶ A painter or art-critic familiar with the productions of great artists feels himself insulted if you offer him evidence to convince him of the genuineness of a work of art over and above the evidence which it carries in itself, and which to him is the most convincing of all. If one of the lost books of Tacitus were recovered, scholars would not judge it by any account that might be given of its preservation and discovery, but would say, Let us see it and read it, and we will very soon tell you whether it is genuine or not. When the man you have seen every day for years, and whose character you have looked into under the strongest lights, is accused of dishonesty, and damaging evidence is brought against him, does it seriously disturb your confidence in him? Not at all. No evidence can countervail the knowledge gained by intercourse. You *know* the man, directly, and you believe in him without regard to what other persons advance in his favour or against him. Christ expects acceptance on similar grounds.[1]

While our Lord was founding His Kingdom, men perpetually asked Him for some sign of His authority. Partly no doubt this was the mockery of cynics, who hoped to discredit Him by demanding miracles which they supposed Him powerless to perform; partly it was the sincere demand of good but unventuresome people who wanted a guarantee that in following Him they would not be wasting their lives. And he says that this demand for evidence and guarantees is a proof of spiritual worthlessness. 'As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.' It will look as if it had ended in nothing, as the mission of Jonah looked as if it had ended in nothing before it had well begun. That sign should be granted; but it would be of no use to those whose rejection of the preaching was the cause of its apparent failure.

We are always trying to shirk the responsibility which rests upon us for answering to the Divine call as it comes to each of us individually. We want to set up some authority which may save us the trouble of thinking and the risk involved in answering the challenge of faith. So men have taken the Bible and called it infallible, and then put their minds to sleep; or they have set up a Church and called it infallible, and then put their minds to sleep. Or they have taken some miracle, like the Resurrection, and said that it proves their doctrine, and then put their minds to sleep. But Christ will not compel men's minds or their allegiance. He lives His life and proclaims His Kingdom; some accept Him as their Lord, and to them, and to them alone, He shows Himself after His resurrection. If He had answered the challenge of the mocking priests, and come down from the Cross, all

[1] Marcus Dods.

the crowds assembled for the Passover must have believed. But what would they have believed? Simply that He was in some way a messenger of God. They would not have thereupon obeyed His one great commandment and begun to love one another, any more than professing Christians, who call Him even Divine, have begun to love one another. Belief that rests on evidence of this kind is not a foundation for the religious life.

And so He gave no sign, not even an assertion, of His Divine commission. Those who are still open to the influence of purity and goodness, who have the hearts of little children, who can still be touched by the appeal of love and respond to the demand for heroism—they accept Him as the Lord of their life, and as they try to follow Him they understand Him more and more, till they know at last that He is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His Person.

The appeal to the heart and conscience must come first—the appeal of Moses and the prophets, and of Christ, the greatest of the prophets. He is more than that; but it is only if we first learn to follow the prophet and the hero that we shall find in Him the Deity which indeed is there.

¶ 'I wish I had your creed, then I would live your life,' said a seeker after truth to Pascal, the great French thinker. 'Live my life, and you will soon have my creed,' was the swift reply. The solution of all difficulties of faith lies in Pascal's answer, which is after all but a variant of Christ's greater saying, 'He that willeth to do the will of God shall know the teaching.' Is not the whole reason why, for so many of us, the religion of Christ which we profess has so little in it to content us, simply this, that we have never heartily and honestly tried to practise it? [1]

We and the whole Church are eager to do Christ honour by bestowing on Him every title we can think of; we offer our prayers in His name; we adore Him as Creator and Redeemer of the world. The one thing that does not cross our minds is to do what He tells us to do. There are people who are hungry; there are people who are degraded, and sinking perpetually lower for need of a helping hand; there are people who have never heard of Christ at all. And we, who believe, forsooth, that God raised Him from the dead, are content that it should be so. 'Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?' What we need to get rid of is our habit of relying upon anything rather than our own perception of what is noble in our effort to avoid all danger of mistake. The man who has been drawn out of himself by the love of Christ and the purpose of God for the world will not stop to ask if he is making a mistake in obeying Christ's commands. A power has taken hold of him, the power of the Holy Spirit, which is the Spirit of Christ's sacrifice, and he yields himself to it not reluctantly, nor barely willingly, but in the joy of devotion.

Follow your own perception of what is noble and heroic. This appeal to our moral and spiritual faculties must be answered first—the appeal of Moses and the prophets. 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead.' It is perfectly true. One has risen from the dead, and we are not persuaded.[1]

[1] W. J. Dawson, *The Empire of Love*, 101.

The Sin of Causing Others to Sin

Luke xvii. 1, 2.—'Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.'

It was our Lord's method at all times not to speak in general terms about the evils of the world, but to open our eyes to certain particular evils for which we ourselves are to be blamed. For it may become a snare to us, blunting our own quick sense of right and wrong, to be thinking too much of the great mass of evil in the world. Because it is only a little that the best of us can do to beat back the sea of moral evil we hear many subtle voices persuading us not even to do that little. And so, by thinking too much about the immense presence of evil in the world, and too little about our own unquenchable sense of right and wrong, we become soft and depressed and sluggish in our own moral judgments and in the demands which we make upon ourselves.

These words of our Lord raise that other side of the matter which is our proper concern. They speak to us of certain evils which spring

[1] W. Temple, *Repton School Sermons*, 113.

from our own behaviour, evils for which no one is to be charged but ourselves. 'It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him through whom they come.'

1. When one comes to think of it, one sees that there is no sin that a man may commit which does not involve another; that we cannot ourselves sin without causing others to sin. We sometimes hear men speak as though they were responsible only to themselves for the way they live. We hear one say, 'I can surely do as I like. I'm not asking any one to follow me. If I am doing wrong I shall bear the penalty. My behaviour is no other's business.' But how untrue all that is! Not to speak of the sins which we can commit only through the hurt of others, involving them with ourselves, how very far from the truth it is that we can any of us bear the whole penalty of our sin, that no injury need come to others through our wrongdoing!

The knowledge that we have injured others beyond our power to repair; that through us, and through us alone, it may be, they lost their way; that we have no right to be happy even in God's forgiveness until we have confessed to them and sought to make amends—this indeed is the consideration which in penitent souls provokes to tears. And it is this same thought, that we in our sin provoked others to sin, which through all our regenerate days binds us by a tender sorrow to Jesus Christ, and keeps us humble to the end and touched with a certain sadness in our memories.

Once our eyes have been opened to see how as a matter of fact 'no man liveth to himself,' how it is of the very nature of most sins that they involve others, how we may easily have set up an evil spirit in the life of another, and how that evil spirit once in possession of that other's soul may run riot there in a way which we did not reckon upon—once our eyes have been opened to these things, the danger is not that we shall think too lightly of this sin of causing others to sin, but that we shall think of it unduly and with a certain despair of ourselves.

2. We must bear in mind, however, that it is the end and purpose of all God's warnings not to entangle us but to teach us the truth and to help us in what remains. And so here. 'Woe unto him through whom offences come.' If such words bring any of us to a standstill because they convict us, we must find our peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. But for these and for us all the words have a further use. They speak as though all the evil in the world proceeded from human hearts; that one smites another with the disease and taint. Let us consider, then, some of the ways in which we may be guilty of the sin of causing others to sin, that we may be on our guard and that we may repent.

(1) Deliberately to tempt another to commit a sin is to be an agent of the Evil One. One would like to believe that it is not common, though one hears of it and reads of its occurrence—middle-aged men tempting those who are younger, encouraging them by their apparent freedom from care, by their absence of scruples, to embark on a moral career which can only be ruinous at the last; older boys tainting the minds of younger boys; those who know the world breaking their miserable knowledge to those who are still happily ignorant—these are among the ways in which one may sin this heavy sin of causing another to offend.

(2) The inconsistencies of professed Christians are often urged, by people who have themselves no wish to be serious, as the reason for their way of living. But deducting all that, which in their case is only a pretence, there is in truth much in what they say although they may not be the people to say it. It is incalculable, the evil that is done when the world discovers a dark blot in the life of one reputed to be good. For every good man in the world is a kind of security to all of us for God, for the good soul in all things: and when a good man has fallen there is a tremor of insecurity in the faith of even the most sure. A man can do no more grievous injury to those about him and to the time in which he lives than to have given cause to people to suspect that there is no real goodness in the world.

¶ How a mother who had previously been her son's 'bulwark 'gainst the sea of doubts,' injured him when he discovered that she had proved herself unworthy is told by Walter C. Smith.

Gone the fond vision of his trustful youth,
Gone all the awe of natural reverence,

Gone the pure love that seemed of heaven above,
Gone all the certainty of worth and truth—
The fell-mist clouded every higher sense.

Could that be true which she, in falsehood, taught?
Could that be good, which, being ill, she praised?
And oh the pain, the ache of heart and brain!
To think that mother could be base and naught,
On whom as God's stern witness he had gazed.

For still our common Heaven is seldom reared
On solid arch of reason, firmly built,
But the high Faith that has to vanquish death
Rests on the lap where first we prayed, and feared,
And wondered in the dawn of thought and guilt.[1]

Our Lord speaks on behalf of the 'little ones,' because it is they who trust instinctively the example and counsels of older Christians, and who are most easily led astray by careless conduct or thoughtless utterances which are taken to sanction a wrong course. To refuse forgiveness, to suggest by one's example that the demand of discipleship is not so hard as might be supposed, or to teach that confession and hardship may be avoided with impunity—that is, for Jesus, a sin which He visits with the utmost reprobation.[2]

3. The words of our text convey a warning to us all; for we are none of us without influence and a following. Countless numbers of men accept or reject Christ because of their friends or acquaintances, who have not even a suspicion of the influence they wield. Every man has a power in his person greater than his words: the bad man (or the bad nation), whether he will or no, is a destroyer: he is poisoning the atmosphere around him and is making it a fitting medium for the power of wickedness to work in: his faithless spirit, his materialism, his worldliness of heart, his sensual desires are taking hold of other lives and drawing them downward with him.

But there are those to whom the words ought to come with a serious and particular force, those on whom God has laid the responsibility and honour of guiding and forming the lives of others. There is a warning to all who teach Christianity, a warning not to add or omit, from any motive whatsoever, truths which are vital to the gospel. They will be held responsible for having induced others to take Christ less seriously than He meant. Above all, there is a warning to those who are parents or who have homes. It is not what we teach but what we are that gives its tone to our home and makes it a school for goodness and heaven or for evil and destruction.

Children inevitably see things as we really see them. Their souls adopt our moral judgments, our instinctive attitudes. They take up in secret that style of thought and imagination, that kind of outlook upon mankind, that sense of the reality or the unreality of God and the unseen world which came to them, not as we acted a part at certain fixed times, but as they observed us day by day, as they listened to the things we talked about, the judgments we passed, the things we made light of, or approved, or condemned.

Men often find it passing hard to pray
Amid the brawl of those who buy and sell;
But when a heart is tempted to obey
The sinister suggestions that impel
A man to craven compromise with hell,
God sends him many a thing that purifies;
But none for power and beauty can excel
The guileless look in little children's eyes.[1]

It is well for us, then, as those who believe in God, that we should feel how responsible our life is, how potent for good as for evil, in order that, with a new sense of the reality of it all, we may ask Him to search our hearts and cleanse us of any spirit which might hinder another or cause some one to offend.

Keeping the Roads Open

Luke xvii. 3.—'If thy brother sin, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him' (R.V.).

1. '*If thy brother sin.*'—But we must be quite sure about it. We can so easily be mistaken. Summary judgment can be villainously unjust. The assumed criminal may be altogether innocent, and his supposed crime may be the ugly figment of our own diseased imagination. For, through what perverting media we can look at

[1] *Borland Hall.*
[2] J. Moffatt, in *The Expository Times*, xxvi. 409.

[1] Kennedy Williamson, *The Uncarven Timbers*, 84.

one another, and what monsters we appear when seen through a distorting lens! And therefore the primary rule of guidance in all presumed offences is that a man should examine his lens. Is the lens a perverting medium?

2. '*Rebuke him.*'—But, assuming that there is no distorting lens corrupting our judgment, and that the offence is palpable when seen through cool and simple sight, what then should be our course? 'Rebuke him.' Well, that would be pleasant enough. It is an exercise which provides a feast for the majority of people, and we set about it with rare satisfaction. But there are rebukes and rebukes. There is a rebuke which is only intended to satisfy the offended, and there is a rebuke which is purposed to rectify the offender. A legitimate rebuke is more than a vent for passion—it is a minister of redemption.

We may quite easily ascertain whether our rebuke has been of the kind counselled by the Master. The test is to be found in whether we are prepared to go further with our Lord. 'If he repent, forgive him.' The fine aim and trend of all Christian rebuke is ultimate reconciliation. A rebuke is not penal, but surgical, and always and everywhere it is purposed to be a minister of moral and spiritual restoration.

¶ Scott had hardly been a week in possession of his new domains, before he made acquaintance with a character much better suited to his purpose than James Hogg ever could have been. I mean honest Thomas Purdie, his faithful servant—his affectionately devoted humble friend from this time until death parted them. Tom was first brought before him, in his capacity of Sheriff, on a charge of poaching, when the poor fellow gave such a touching account of his circumstances—a wife and I know not how many children depending on his exertions—work scarce and grouse abundant—and all this with a mixture of odd, sly humour—that the Sheriff's heart was moved. Tom escaped the penalty of the law—was taken into employment as shepherd, and showed such zeal, activity, and shrewdness in that capacity, that Scott never had any occasion to repent of the step he soon afterwards took, in promoting him to the position which had been originally offered to James Hogg.[1]

[1] J. G. Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott*, ii. 192.

3. '*Forgive him.*'—Yes, but the word is not used with the thin significance of effeminate emotion. The forgiveness of the New Testament is not emotional, but motional; not pathetic, but energetic; not a matter of cheap tears, but of sacrificial service. It is more than pardon, it is chivalry. It is more than the withdrawal of the sword, it is the conversion of the sword into a ploughshare. It is the destructive transformed into the constructive, and employed in positive culture. And such a spirit, by the teaching of the Master, will assuredly keep the road open for a sinful brother's return, and we shall be called 'the repairers of the breach, the restorers of paths to dwell in.'

¶ Sir George Henschel tells a story of Mr Harry Brewster, an American artist, who made his home in Paris and in Rome. 'He was both philosopher and poet, and not only *was* both but *lived* both.' This is the story:

'In the large households of Italy, particularly, I think, in Rome, it is not unusual for a family to have a major-domo, that is to say, a sort of superior cook-housekeeper who, besides his salary, gets a certain sum per month to "run the house" on. Brewster's establishment in Rome was founded on that system. His was the good luck of having a major-domo who not only gave him every satisfaction as such, but whom he also esteemed as a man, and who, in his turn, seemed greatly and almost affectionately attached to his master. It was therefore a great shock to Brewster when one day, in examining the books which were brought to him at regular intervals for that purpose, he seemed to detect some irregularities in the keeping of the accounts. Having grown to be sincerely fond of the man, the discovery caused Brewster pain amounting to a real grief. This he carried about with him for several days, unable to decide on the course that would appear the best to be taken in a matter which affected him very deeply. At last his mind was made up. Seated before the writing table in his study, the proofs of the man's guilt spread before him, he rang the bell and asked for the major-domo to be sent to him. The man entered, visibly turning pale at the sight of his master's serious face, and evidently divining the reason for this unwonted summons. There was an ominous silence in the lofty room as the two men faced each other, until Brewster broke it by quietly

telling his servant how great a grief it was to him to have found that for some months past he had been cheated by him . . . that he could only assume the salary he had been paying him had been insufficient, and that from that day on he would double it. . . . That was all. Doubtless a risky thing to do; but Brewster knew the sort of nature he had to deal with. There were no words of response from the servant. Prostrating himself before his master and kissing his hands, he silently sobbed until Brewster bade him get up. The man then left the room as one in a daze—not only a better, but a good man for the rest of his life.' [1]

4. *The principles behind the teaching.*—Let us seek to grasp one or two vital principles which lie behind the teaching.

We must begin here—a man's finest asset is his *integrity*. It is just as well that even so familiar a commonplace as this should be re-emphasized. We are in such general agreement about it that it is apt to be ignored. 'A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth.' Things provide only an existence; in character is found the life.

And the second step is this: the finest contribution which any man can make to a city or a nation is the contribution of *an unblemished character*, the gift of a scrupulously clean and consistent life. It is ever a temptation to men to esteem gifts more than dispositions, to exalt the showy and the dazzling more than the inherently good. We are captured and fascinated by genius and talent, and cleverness, and subtle and ingenious accomplishments. And yet these do not constitute the sterling wealth of the corporate life.

If, therefore, a man has lapsed from moral and spiritual health, and is squandering his finest treasure, it should surely be his brother's concern, for his own sake as well as for the sake of the offender, to keep the way open for his return.

Because of Thy strong faith, I kept the track
Whose sharp-set stones my strength had well-nigh spent;
I could not meet Thy eyes if I turned back:
So on I went.

[1] G. Henschel, *Musings and Memories of a Musician*, 381.

Because Thou wouldst not yield belief in me,
The threatening crags that rose my way to bar
I conquered inch by crumbling inch—to see
The goal afar.

And though I struggle toward it through hard years,
Or flinch, or falter blindly, yet within,
'You can,' unwavering my spirit hears:
And I shall win.

When a man becomes morally defiled he introduces uncleanness into the commonwealth. So even for our own sakes, it is wise to seek an offender's restoration. Our sense of the corporate life is so dull and faint that we only very imperfectly discern the influence of the part upon the whole. Our conception of society is mechanical, not organic; it is political, not vital. We think of society as a chance collection, not as a nerve-pervaded corporation. At the best we regard it only as an aggregation and not as a union. But the teaching of the Scriptures brings before us a far more profound conception. According to the New Testament, society is not a mere combination, like a heap of miscellaneous articles which the ocean has thrown up on the shore. The race of men constitutes one vast, nervy body, with all the members vitally interdependent, vitally inter-communicative, inherently one and whole, every part related to every other part in community of interest, and every part suffering in so far as any part is undeveloped or bruised or broken.

¶ So long as China's hordes are stagnant we ourselves shall remain immature! So long as the cannibal tribes of tropical islands drowse on in their animalism we ourselves shall not be fully awake! So long as anywhere in broad England any man is mentally or morally dwarfed, every other man will be hindered from gaining his appointed stature! No man will walk at his full height so long as any man remains a pigmy! One moral cripple affects the pace of the race! [1]

But if we are to be 'the repairers of the breach' we must ourselves have faith in the spiritualities. We must believe in God and in the energies of godliness so that we can exercise the ministry of forgiveness in His way.

'Only Heaven
Means crowned, not vanquished, when it says forgiven.'

[1] J. H. Jowett, *Things that Matter Most*, 252.

The Meaning of Faith

Luke xvii. 5, 6.—'And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.'

The first principle of the Christian life is faith, but faith is not the monopoly of Christian men. We are all men of faith. The only difference is as to how far and in what direction our faith goes. The little child does not learn to walk without faith. Until it exercises faith it crawls upon its hands and knees. The whole of our social system is held together by faith. We no longer issue forth from the shelter of our houses fully armed. The portcullis and moat are relics and reminders of an age when men could not trust one another. Every time we get into a train we employ faith in unknown drivers, unseen signalmen, invisible platelayers. The world of commerce rests upon the principle of credit and mutual confidence. All our greatest commercial transactions are negotiated without the exchange of a single coin.

Now this faculty of faith which we are constantly exercising manwards was given us that we might supremely employ it towards God. It is by the very universality of this faculty of faith that man is prevented from pleading that he has not the equipment for a spiritual life—an equipment which is well developed in everyone through constant use, though failing of its highest purpose until directed to God. It is of little avail, however, that we have much faith if it be misdirected. The disciples come to Jesus desiring a large supply of faith, 'Lord, increase our faith.' Our Lord's reply in effect is: 'It is not first of all quantity but true quality of faith you need. If you possessed a speck of true faith, if you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you would be able to overcome mountains of difficulty and temptation, and achieve the apparently impossible.'

¶ People say, 'Lord, increase our faith.' Did not the Lord rebuke His disciples for that prayer? He said, 'You do not want a great faith, but faith in a great God. If your faith were as small as a grain of mustard seed, it would suffice to remove this mountain!' [1]

[1] Hudson Taylor.

Let us note some of the main characteristics of Christian faith, that faith which can accomplish so much.

1. *Faith produces convictions rather than opinions.*—In this superficial age men are quite content to have religious opinions. Conviction is rather a strenuous word for an age which prefers the couch to the battlefield, and which likes to hold everything lightly and cheaply. Do you wonder that we are greeted on every side to-day with the question, 'Does it matter what a man believes?' No, of course it does not matter, if a man's religious beliefs are merely something in the nature of opinions—if they are simply so much furniture with which he decorates the apartments of his mind; then, of course, there is no reason why he should not shift and shunt about his credal furniture, or even hold it upon the hire system, as indeed some seem to do. There are people who are always chopping and changing about; now they hire in the furniture of the spiritualist, now that of the theosophist, and at another time that of the Christian Scientist. But let not those men imagine that they know what true faith is. True faith produces convictions, not simply opinions. A man's real beliefs are not so much furniture to be shifted about, but fixtures built into the very structure of the soul, incorporated into the life, and therefore productive of character. A grain of real conviction is worth more than whole cartloads of religious opinions perfunctorily recited, and often only partially understood.

2. *It calls forth an active response in the life.*—A man's consciousness of his relation to God may be so vague as to exercise no appreciative influence upon his conduct and character. Such, indeed, will be the result if his faith be a mere mental assent to a set of propositions, an intellectual persuasion. But true faith in the Christian sense springs from the heart as well as the head.

Think not the faith by which the just shall live
Is a dead creed, a map correct of Heaven,
Far less a feeling fond and fugitive,
A thoughtless gift, withdrawn as soon as given,
It is an affirmation and an act
That bids eternal truth be present fact.[1]

[1] Hartley Coleridge.

True faith is an active operative principle. Faith without works is dead. A creed which does nothing is not faith, but faith's skeleton with the life extinct. In the Gospels you will find that Christ never dignified with the name of faith a belief in which there was no courage to venture or to act. Our Lord always looks upon faith as something which goes right down to the springs of action, committing a man's whole soul to His allegiance.

¶ One of the passengers on board the *Atlantic*, which was wrecked off Fisher's Island, was Principal J. R. Andrews of New London. He could not swim, but he determined to make a desperate effort to save his life. Binding a life-preserver about him, he stood on the edge of the deck waiting his opportunity, and when he saw a wave moving shoreward, he jumped into the rough breakers and was borne safely to land. He was saved by faith. He accepted the conditions of salvation. Forty perished in a scene where he was saved. In one sense he saved himself; in another sense he depended upon God. It was a combination of personal activity and dependence upon God that resulted in his salvation. If he had not used the life-preserver, he would have perished; if he had not cast himself into the sea, he would have perished. So faith in Christ is reliance upon Him for salvation; but it is also our own making of a new start in life and the showing of our trust by action.[1]

3. *It brings to life truths which seemed dead and ineffectual.*—Truths never exercise a vital influence upon you until you employ a real faith in them. Then immediately they begin to live and move and have their being, and make themselves felt in the life.

Lord Bacon speaks of 'bedridden truths.' By that phrase he means those truths which are ineffectually realized, and for some reason or other have not been allowed to produce the logical effect that they are competent to produce. For instance, the truth of liberty was a truth which all great thinkers in the Middle Ages longed to see established in society—liberty of the subject in speech and action. But for many years this truth was bedridden, impotent, invalided. But directly a sufficient number of men came to believe in the necessity of liberty, their corporate faith strengthened the ankle joints of this truth, it walked downstairs, and began to make its voice heard in the street. The truth became a vital reality in the life of the individual and the nation.

There are many Christian truths that exercise no vital influence in our life, because we have never reposed in them that real confidence which quickens them and renders them of effectual value.

4. *It has also a wonderful creative influence.*—Dr Illingworth, writing of faith, calls it 'sight become creative.' 'Human sight,' he says, 'like human reason, feeds upon experience, must have an object set before it, cannot work without materials. But faith is independent of experience, and in a way creates its object. It sees in darkness, believes without evidence, is certain of impossibilities, grapples with and forces the blank, dark, empty nothingness into substance, and consistency, and reality, and life: it is the reflection almost too bright for frail human nature of the Divine power that can create *ex nihilo*.'

Faith, then, has not only a recreative power but a creative. It can create for the Christian a new heaven and a new earth. A whole new world of desires and hopes, of interests and points of view—in short, a completely different atmosphere is created for him who comes to utilize a Christian faith. He begins to share with his Maker the infinite joy of creating a cosmos out of chaos.

5. *Lastly, it is essentially faith in a Person.*—The faith that Christ demands is not faith in a doctrine or a system or an historical fact, but faith in Himself. We are coming to see more and more clearly that the fundamental conception of religion according to Christ's thought is as a personal relation to God.

¶ 'True Christianity,' says the Bishop of Oxford, 'is a personal relationship—the conscious deliberate adhesion of men who know their weakness, their sin, their fallibility to a Redeemer whom they know to be supreme, sinless, infallible.'

When we realize that the central feature of Christian discipleship is a relation to a Person, the word faith assumes that meaning of trust which is really the highest meaning it is capable of bearing. The first and last meaning of faith for the Christian must be trust in a Person.

[1] A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, iii. 840.

All other meanings of faith are subordinate to this one. The Christian ought to be able to think of his life entirely in the terms of trust.

I have a life with Christ to live,
But, ere I live it, must I wait
Till learning can clear answer give
Of this and that book's date?

I have a life in Christ to live,
I have a death in Christ to die;—
And must I wait, till science give
All doubts a full reply?

Nay rather, while the sea of doubt
Is raging wildly round about,
Questioning of life and death and sin,
Let me but creep within
Thy fold, O Christ, and at Thy feet
Take but the lowest seat,
And hear Thine awful voice repeat
In gentlest accents, heavenly sweet,
Come unto Me, and rest:
Believe Me, and be blest.[1]

The Vitality of Faith

Luke xvii. 6.—'Faith as a grain of mustard seed.'

It is abundantly clear from the Gospel story that the mind of Jesus was deeply impressed by the power of response and the mystery of growth, both in Nature and in the human heart. He is constantly using illustrations of them. He dwelt much on the secret processes and mighty potencies of Nature, and drew largely upon His loving observation and intimate knowledge of Nature to give point and power to His message. This analogy of the mustard seed is a suggestive instance. The mustard seed is among the smallest of seeds, yet it has extraordinary powers of growth and reproduction. It is only an annual, yet in Palestine it grows to the height of about twelve feet. One of the Rabbis said that his mustard-tree flourished so much in a certain year that he could climb into the branches of it. Whether that is true or not, it illustrates the character of the mustard seed. It may begin small, but it cannot stay small; a grain of sand may, but not a mustard seed.

Jesus declares that a man's faith may be no bigger than that to start with,—an irreducible minimum—yet, though so apparently insignificant, it is not by any means a negligible quantity. *It is alive!* Alive, though it may not yet have been put to use; alive, though it may not yet have been set in conditions of growth; alive, though it may not yet have responded to the powers that are able to bring it to fertility and usefulness. The *life* in that minute seed is the impressive thing; and it is the life in the faith-faculty that seizes upon the devout imagination, for in that living force there lie hidden inconceivable possibilities.

¶ How wonderful it is when a man is born with a grain of poetry in his brain! That fact differentiates him from the vast majority of men, and gives to his words and work charm and power. In his imagination common things are mysteriously enhanced, the splendour of nature unseen by other eyes dazzles his, and human life, so prosaic to the mass, is romantic to one in whose soul shines the poetic gleam. We may inherit only a grain of poetry, yet that mystic atom makes an almost infinite difference; the world that otherwise were a dust-heap is a jewel-heap, and life that otherwise were dark and dull is sprinkled with azure and gold. And this mere dust of poetry in the brain creates the picture, the music, the song, the oration about which men talk, and which they do not willingly let die.[1]

1. The growth of a seed depends upon its response to its environment. It is the result of its acceptance of certain conditions. Some seed is never put into conditions of growth; it may lie in a box or a packet, or perhaps lie for centuries in a tomb, as in the case of seeds found in some of the ancient tombs of Egypt; the life is in the seed all the time, but it is not revealed. But let the seed be put in the earth, and at once it is in its element. The chemical properties of the earth and the air co-operate with it; rain, dew, wind, sunshine all come to play upon it; by and by it appears in tender beauty above the ground and lives the life natural to its kind. It is not otherwise with the faith of men. It must be set in conditions of growth; it must respond to its environment. In many men faith lies hidden and dormant like the seed in the box; the capacity is there, the force is there, but it has never been used. It needs to be drawn out by a power akin to it.

[1] J. C. Shairp.

[1] W. L. Watkinson, *The Ashes of Roses*, 215.

2. What is the environment of the soul? The simple answer is—God. Paul put it in a sentence when he told the Athenians that 'we live, and move, and have our being' in God.

¶ 'The grace of God!' cries Stevenson. 'We live in it, we breathe it, we walk upon it. It is the roof, the rafters, the floor, and the nails of the universe!'

> He glows above
> With scarce an intervention, presses close
> And palpitatingly, His soul o'er ours.[1]

That is a spiritual fact. Whether a man believes it, realizes it, is conscious of it or not, the truth of the matter is precisely that. That is quite enough to account for the great peace and the quiet confidence and the sober joy of a man who has realized the truth and responded freely to it; it is quite enough also to account for the fact of our uneasiness and restlessness and dissatisfaction when we have not yielded to the constraint of it. What is the meaning of the vain longings, the unformed yearnings, the strange, dim thoughts that visit us as if from some other world? What is the explanation of the conflict that goes on within? What are these voices calling us out of self, out of smallness, out of wrong? The meaning is that 'we live, and move, and have our being' in God, and He is trying to make us conscious of the fact, trying to break through the outworks of our life into the inner citadel, trying to set free the forces that may co-operate with Him in a life of richer purpose and nobler destiny. It is the sun calling to the hidden seed; it is the voice of the wind sighing above it; it is the summons of the rain penetrating down to it. The seed will respond: will the man?

¶ When Ernest Wilberforce was appointed to the See of Newcastle he received a letter from Wilkinson of St Peter's, Eaton Square, who was himself to be raised to the Episcopate before many months had elapsed: 'May God bless you, my dear Ernest, in this great work. Mrs Wilberforce remembers what I have more than once said to her as to the gifts which God has given you. You remember a walk we once had in the Park, when we talked of faith in its wider sense as expressing the power which is given to man of opening his heart to receive what God has already given us in Christ Jesus our Lord. Dear Ernest, open wide your heart and receive the fullness of the Power of the Holy Ghost, and let that Divine Spirit bring out for the use of the Church all the gifts which are only waiting for His touch to be developed. Believe that God has chosen you to be His instrument—to be the channel through which His life may flow out to your diocese. The more you feel your natural weakness so much the more do you dwell on the Divine Power which only requires for its manifestation the comprehension of our own nothingness and faith in the reality of His in-dwelling Presence.'[1]

[1] Browning, *Paracelsus*.

3. Our environment is very much larger than we can see. There is an Invisible that surrounds us, interpenetrates us, calls us, is capable of doing great things, of accomplishing the apparently impossible. The Invisible plays a great part in human affairs, greater than we dream of. One of the meanest and vulgarest of all proverbs is that which declares that 'seeing is believing.' It is nothing of the kind. You hold a magnet in your hand; a few inches away is a needle; the needle begins to stir as the magnet approaches, till suddenly it flies over the intervening space and clings fast to the magnet. What did it? The Invisible. Yonder in the Atlantic is a vessel; you are a passenger on board; one morning as you sit on deck a message from home, hundreds of miles away, is handed to you. What brought it? The Invisible. If this physical world is so delicate and sensitive, how much more must the world of spirit be? It was faith that brought wireless telegraphy into being, and it has literally removed mountains and seas as well by so doing; the first experiments were made in faith, and faith proved that there is an environment—invisible—that responds to it. If this be so in earthly things, why not in heavenly things? Will God not respond to the prayers that rise to Him night and day? Does He not hear the heart's silent cry for help? Can our friends send us messages through space, and is God alone debarred from communicating with the man He has made?

4. Faith is not always easy; but it has a real and vital record of its own. 'The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God,' but it is too late to tell some of us that; we have been responding

[1] *Life of the Right Reverend Ernest Roland Wilberforce*, 98.

to God's encircling presence ever since our faith awoke from its sleep, and our experience tells us that the fool's jaunty statement is indeed the statement of a fool. Faith *knows* God, not in the sense of intellectually understanding Him, but knows Him by sympathy, by feeling, by kinship, by a communion of spirit that proves its reality by the continuity of its discipline and the beauty of its conduct.

There are many helps to the realization of the environing God. Prayer, public worship, the study of truth, faithfulness to present light, the doing of common duty, the fulfilling of everyday relationships and responsibilities—these are all helps. And there are many occasions when we may demonstrate the power of faith to ourselves and to those about us. In industry, in discipline, in temptation, in sin, in sickness, in sorrow, in the clash of temperaments, in all the manifold experience of daily life there are opportunities for faith to show its animating and sustaining power. 'If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed,' God will respond; and men shall wonder at the mysterious beauty of the the flower that blooms in the midst of them.

The Possibilities of Faith

Luke xvii. 6.—'If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.'

THIS reads like an extravagant statement, but there can be no question that our Lord meant what He was saying. We call it a figure of speech, and make our escape from its implications under cover of the imagery. But there is a world of difference between not taking a statement literally and not taking it seriously. The hyperbole would have no point if it did not contain the challenge of the truth.

1. There is one thing we have not done with this saying of Jesus—the one thing we ought to have done—tested it, put it to the proof. There is a condition attaching to these high achievements, but it is on the human side, not on the Divine. If we would only fulfil the necessary requirement, we could do anything in the name of Christ. Almightiness would be at our disposal. That does not mean that we should be able to exploit Divine power for our own ends. Our Lord does not say that. What He does say is that there is, through Him, a power at our disposal which is effective beyond anything we can conceive. The smallest grain of faith would enable us to achieve apparently impossible results for the furtherance of our life.

Take it out of the Gospel, and see how it looks in another setting. Stripped of all theological colour, it really amounts to this, that there is in us a spiritual force which, when reinforced, is greater in its conscious dominance than anything we term material. In the world of physical things, man removes the mountain by tunnelling it. He transplants forests in the sea when he drives piles to carry a bridge across the estranging gulf. Science is a tremendous believer. Even so decided an agnostic as Professor Huxley says: 'The ground of every one of our actions and the validity of all our reasonings, rest upon the great act of faith which leads us to take the experience of the past as a safe guide in our dealings with the present and the future.' But in the realm of the spirit, how meekly we go under the yoke of our prevailing conditions. We accept too readily the humiliating bondage of circumstances. We say this or that cannot be helped or hindered. It must be submitted to, because it is the Lord's will. Resignation is sometimes used as a pious synonym for want of spirit. We are so apt to accept as final a state of things that was only meant to try us. We speak of an untoward experience as a 'trial,' and here, for once, we have got hold of the right word. That is just what it is, a trial, a test, putting us to the proof to show what is in us, sent for us 'to meet and master, and make crouch beneath our foot, and so be pedestalled in triumph.'

2. We all know what can be done by a man who believes in himself. He will initiate schemes that make the diffident faint with apprehension for him, and he will succeed in carrying them through. No man can read the life of Napoleon Bonaparte, from his obscure early days in Corsica to the brilliant days when he strode across Europe like a colossus, without being impressed with the amazing energy which attached to an audacious self-confidence. His confidence was not in a cause, but in himself, and his confidence generated a marvellous strength. 'All things are possible to him who believes in himself.' Cromwell's Ironsides

turned the tide of battle on many a stricken field, and never knew defeat, because they considered themselves invincible. Emerson's dictum, 'They can conquer who believe they can,' is verified every working day.

There is nothing, I hold, in the way of work
That a human being may not achieve
If he does not falter, or shrink or shirk,
And more than all, if he will *believe*.

Believe in himself and the power behind
That stands like an aid on a dual ground,
With hope for the spirit and oil for the wound,
Ready to strengthen the arm or mind.[1]

Or think of the influence exerted by one who has faith in his fellow-men. We have all experienced something of the spell cast by certain people who are able to draw out the best that is in us. In their company we simply excel ourselves. Under their encouragement we expand and add a cubit to our stature. We realize our possible selves and rise to the height of our power. We can do what we would be incapable of otherwise, because they believe in us and meet us with a frank and trusting spirit that calls out our latent capacities.

¶ Mrs Oliphant says of Edward Irving: 'He had so much celestial light in his eyes that he unconsciously assigned to every one whom he addressed a standing ground in some degree equal to his own. He addressed ordinary individuals as if they were heroes and princes; charged a candidate for the ministry to be at once an apostle, a gentleman, and a scholar; made poor astonished women in tiny London apartments feel themselves ladies in the light of his courtesy; and unconsciously elevated every man he talked with into the ideal man he ought to have been.'

3. If faith in oneself and one's fellows can work such wonders, need we be surprised if faith in the Son of God with power can put at our command a force that is practically irresistible? If men and women have made history by trusting themselves and by confiding in others, what could they not do by trusting Christ?

[1] Ella Wheeler Wilcox, *Maurine and Other Poems*, 209.

'Well,' says someone, 'that may be all very true in theory, only it does not work out in practice. I believe in Christ, and it makes little or no difference in my life. I have still the same insuperable difficulties to face and the same sense of abject helplessness in presence of the domineering laws of nature and the stubborn facts of experience.' If that be so, then you don't believe. You have not got faith. You may not even understand what it means. For this saving faith of which we are speaking, this faith that works, and works wonders, is not the creed or confession to which you subscribe. It is not your *credo* but your *fides*, your confidence in Christ begotten by the appeal He makes to you. It has more of a moral than an intellectual quality. It need not be denied that it is founded on a reasoned belief of some sort, but it is something different from it, more intimate, more personal, more practical. It is akin to the credit on which commerce is conducted, the goodwill on which society is based.

¶ 'Faith,' says the writer to the Hebrews, 'means being confident of what we hope for, being convinced of what we do not see.' It is not a passive state of mind but an active exercise of the will, and when it is exercised toward Christ, it involves an act of committal. It may even be an act of self-abandon. You may say, looking at a frozen pond, 'I believe that ice is bearing,' but if you refuse to go on in case you should go through, then you don't believe it is bearing. Faith is not believing in spite of evidence, as has been said, but it is acting in scorn of consequences. It makes no provision for failure.

Faith that goes forward triumphs. Seas divide at its touch and mountains move at its word. Under its influence the weak become strong and the timid lose their fear. It subdues kingdoms, works righteousness, and turns weaklings into invincible warriors, who put to flight the armies of the alien. By it men sing in the night, worship in caves, and pray in prisons. Nothing can daunt them; nothing can overcome them. Exultant, jubilant, triumphant, the men of faith are the hosts of God.

They climbed the steep ascent of heaven
Through peril, toil and pain.
O God! to us may grace be given,
To follow in their train.

Unprofitable Servants

Luke xvii. 7-10.—'But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.'

This parable is often neglected by religious teachers, and is only lightly touched upon by most commentators. One reason for its neglect may be that it has no historical setting. It therefore lacks a certain interest which attaches to other parables. We know nothing about the occasion, the place, or the reason of its delivery, although this Evangelist is generally especially careful to allude to these. Perhaps it is best to acknowledge, with the French commentator Godet, that the parable 'is a remnant scrap at the bottom of Luke's portfolio which he delivers to us as it was and without any introduction,' putting it just where it seems least out of place.

The tale itself is exceedingly simple, and needs but little exposition. The slave has been all day long under the hot sun in the fields, ploughing or tending sheep. The day is over, and the little household gathers together for the evening meal. This one slave is all the master has. There are great moments of inspiration given to all of us at times when, to nerve us to better efforts, Christ lets us think that on us alone depends the whole issue in our little world of the fight between good and evil. We are warned to meet these moments with the more courage because the responsibility is so great. If on us alone 'hangs the issue of the day,' then let our arms be nerved with the strength of ten. 'One on God's side is a majority.' The day's work in the fields is done now, and the slave is warned that it is the natural thing that he should be expected to gird up once more the long Eastern robes and fasten them to his belt that he may the more easily serve his master at table. When all this is done he is warned to take no credit to himself, to leave the debtor and creditor account to be reckoned up in heaven (God keeps His books exactly), and to call himself 'unprofitable.' This is a poor translation, though it is hard to convey the meaning better in a single word. It means really not so much a man who has done nothing profitable as a man who has done no more than he ought to do. Let us dismiss from our minds the idea that 'unprofitable' means 'wicked' or 'worthless.' It may mean 'a man who has done what he ought not to do,' but it certainly does not mean this here.

Now let us try to sum up the lessons of the parable. They seem to be mainly three:

(1) The service of God is not an easy service. God claims all our service. It is our duty to give all.

(2) When all has been done, the servant's view of his own service must be always given in the words of our text, 'Unprofitable servants; we have only done our duty.'

(3) When this admission is made, the true glory of God's service will dawn upon us.

1. *The service of God not an easy service.*—One piece of work done is only the signal for another to begin. Range behind range there rise new peaks of service, and as each summit is surmounted another, higher and harder, lies beyond it. But from each peak that we conquer the view grows grander. Life is not easy, and was never meant to be easy. It was the 'fool' who said, 'Take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry,' and it is the fool still.

¶ Henry Ward Beecher, the great American preacher, once got a letter from a youth asking him to find him an easy berth. He replied as follows: 'If you wish an easy berth, don't be an editor. Do not try the law. Do not think of the minstry. Avoid school-keeping. Let alone all ships, stores, shops, merchandise. Abhor politics. Don't practise medicine. Be not a farmer or mechanic; neither be a soldier nor sailor. Oh! my friend, you have come into a hard world. I know of but one easy place in it, and that is the grave.'

We cannot shake ourselves free from the obligation to work. It is not less imperative because it seems hopeless. When you are tired out after a great effort, do not go off into the wilderness like Elijah to growl and complain. Go on working. Remember those fine words of old Bishop Cumberland's, 'It is better to wear out than to rust out.' There are no furloughs in God's service. God claims all,

and if you will not give Him this will have none.

Give all thou hast! High heaven rejects
the lore
Of nicely calculated less or more.

2. *The right estimate of our service.*—The finest test of a man's growth in spirituality is his low estimate of the little he has done, and his crushing sense of the 'vast undone' of life.

¶ Cecil Rhodes devotes his life to the building of an empire, and cries with his last breath, 'So little done; so much to do.' Keats adorns our national literature with lines of imperishable beauty, and then composes his own epitaph in the words: 'Here lies one whose name is writ in water.'[1]

At the beginning of his life Paul prided himself on the faithfulness with which he had kept the law. Later, when he writes to the Corinthians, he sees himself as 'unworthy to be called an apostle'; later still, when he writes to the Ephesians, it is 'less than the least of all saints'; and when the old man sits down, as the shadows are closing round him, to write to Timothy, the words which he finds most appropriate are 'sinners, of whom I am chief.'

¶ Ruffinus, a friend of that great saint, Francis of Assisi, asked him once to tell him exactly what he thought of himself. 'I esteem myself,' answered Francis, 'the greatest sinner of any in the world, and that I serve God less than any other man.'

The man who looks back on life and esteems it other than a failure has failed indeed, for he has not realized the greatness of God's purposes for him. No true painter fails to see the flaws on his canvas. Where others think he has caught and fixed the likeness, he is conscious that the best part of it has escaped him. So we too, as with faulty faltering brush we try to fill in the portrait of Himself which Christ commissions each one of us to leave as his legacy to the world, must be conscious that we have marred His image in innumerable places. Well indeed for us if others can but faintly trace in our portrait the lines of the grand original, but our verdict must always be, 'Unprofitable servants.' And in this very humility of soul lies our truest chance of spiritual advancement. There is a

Stoop of the soul which in bending upraises
it too,
The submission of man's nothing-perfect to
God's all-complete,
As by each new obeisance in spirit I climb to
His feet.

3. *The glory of our service.*—How comes it that the slaves of Christ boast of their chains? Again and again Paul puts in the forefront of his letters as his title of honour, 'Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ.' A strange slavery this, which the proud Roman citizen feels added pride in confessing! For this slavery has this distinctive mark upon it, that every atom of the slave spirit has vanished from it.

Servants of God!—or sons
Shall I not call you? because
Not as servants ye knew
Your Father's innermost mind.

The servile, cringing spirit, ever anxious to avoid new tasks, has passed away, and given place to the filial spirit, to which every new task which the Father appoints is but a new joy.

¶ Plutarch, in his *Life of Lycurgus*, tells a tale of one of the competitors in the Olympic games who, after great difficulty, had won his match and thrown his antagonist. 'And now, Sir Lacedæmonian,' said one of the spectators, 'what are you the better for your victory?' A fair question surely when the only prize was a few leaves; but the man's proud answer was, 'I shall fight next the king,' alluding to their custom that the king should always have about him in battle one who had been crowned in the Olympic games.

The day's work begins in the distant fields. It ends in intimate association with the Master Himself. The reward for service is more service; but that service is more personal, more intimate, more loving.

But there is more than this. When we pass from the service which man deserves and would be happy in to the service which God appoints, we find Him infinitely more tender to our weakness than we ought to be to our own. There comes to us the vision of another supper-table where the Master Himself, Very God of Very God, girded Himself. 'He riseth from supper, and layeth aside his garments; and he took a towel, and girded himself. Then he poureth

[1] P. Watson.

water into the bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet.' Be assured that if after your hard day's work you gird yourself and resolve to wait upon the Lord anew, there will again rise One from the table who shall bid you sit, and then shall take all the weariness from your tired feet. The true complement of this parable is that earlier one in Luke: 'Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them sit down to meat, and shall come and serve them.'

The Sense of Duty

Luke xvii. 10.—'When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.'

This is one of our Lord's hardest sayings. It is especially hard to the comprehension and the temper of an Englishman. Is it too much to say that our Lord's conclusion comes as a surprise, that if it had been spoken by the average upright conscientious Englishman, it would have run, 'We have done that which was our duty to do; therefore we can claim to be profitable servants'? For our race worships this sense of duty. It is our national idol. When on the great day of Trafalgar Nelson flung out his brave motto to the breeze, 'England expects every man to do his duty,' he was unfolding the national faith. Our whole public life rests upon that expectation. We need no despotism to set us in the right road; we do not look to any central office of experts to keep us straight. We entrust large and free powers of self-government to the average conscience of the average man. And our whole English public life would go to pieces unless the national faith had some warrant in fact.

Deep down, unexpressed, but shown by faithful acts, there is in most Englishmen a quiet determination to be just, to keep his word, to do his duty. Nay, may we not go further? In his mind the word 'duty' surely stands for something deeper than it seems to express. Suspicious as he is of emotion, reserved in speech, duty often means to him, God. It is not merely that his duty is his God, but that his God speaks to him in his duty, and there is an instinct of reverence for God in his obedience to it. As Tennyson says in that great ode which is as it were a Psalm of Duty—

He that, ever following her commands,
On, with toil of heart and knees and hands,
Through the long gorge to the far light has won
His path upward and prevailed,
Shall find the toppling crags of Duty scaled
Are close upon the shining table-lands
To which our God Himself is Moon and Sun.

Yet it is plain that our Lord discerns something wanting, some germ of danger in this contented devotion to duty. What is it? Is it not this—that duty, as it is commonly conceived, apart from its heroic aspect, tends to become simply what is expected or recognized by some limited and conventional standard? It is of this lower, but far more common, type of duty that our Lord is speaking in the parable. And here it is that we touch the defects of our British virtue; for in asking himself, 'What is my duty?' the Englishman is apt to find an answer in the standard of public opinion by which he is surrounded. Duty too often means the average expectation in any given condition of life.

¶ The immediate social group in the midst of which our daily life is carried on has its average, and, while we may not have evolved from chameleons, a strong family likeness is suggested by our almost uncanny tendency to adapt our colour to our background.

The hardest task assigned to anyone on earth is living above the average of his own home. Sometimes that is necessary. The difficulty involved here lies in the fact that in all our more intimate relationships with family and friends we feel tremendously the pressure of the herd instinct. When we care for any group of people, as we do for our family and friends, we have put into their hands an almost irresistible influence over us. We respond with telepathic swiftness to their words and emotions. The criticism of a stranger is easily borne, but not the censure of a friend. When, therefore, conflict comes between our best conscience and the general average of our inner social group, we face the need for courage in its acutest form. We know then that to possess the strength of will to live above the average is one of the primary and most searching tests of character.[1]

[1] H. E. Fosdick, *Twelve Tests of Character*, 139.

1. *The limitations of the sense of duty.*—There are two ways in which this real defectiveness of the sense of duty shows itself.

(1) The one is that it limits and narrows the life. It keeps it, indeed, within fixed and safe barriers, but the safety and the ease are had at the cost of progress. We see the average good Englishman, upright and honourable. We like and respect him, yet, somehow, he suggests an arrested possibility. He is so suspicious of enthusiasm that he becomes incapable of it; so distrustful of ideals that he would rather do without them. He prefers the safety of the beaten track to the perils and glories of the open hill. He is content to say, 'Well, at least, we are profitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.' We like him, we respect him, we trust him:

> Only he knows not God,
> Nor all that chivalry of His
> The soldier saints who, row on row,
> Burn upward each to his point of bliss.

(2) And the second defect which goes with this common conception of duty is a certain self-satisfaction. The standard is satisfied: the requirement is met; the expectation is answered. What more can be asked? When we see the narrowness and self-satisfaction that somehow or other spoil the dutiful man, we realize how near the best of us may come to the Pharisee of the New Testament.

2. *The perfect sense of duty.*—What do we need to redeem and transform this great sense of duty which, as we see it reflected in experience, carries with it these plain difficulties and dangers. May we not say that two things are necessary: first, the possession of an inward ideal far above the observances of an outward standard; and, secondly, the recognition of the infinite claim of an Infinite God?

(1) First, we need an inward personal ideal rising ever above the conventional standards of expectation. The inner spirit must refuse to accept limits from the outward circumstances of class or profession, but move past them on a quest of its own. It is thus that the spirit keeps its liberty, and moulds and masters the conditions by which it is surrounded, instead of allowing itself to be mastered and moulded by them. And where there is liberty there is the possibility of progress. It is only by the power of a free inward ideal that character expands and grows. Moreover, thus capable of progress, such a character is incapable of self-satisfaction. A man who is determined in his own inward life to be the best that he can be can never fold his hands and say complacently, 'I am a profitable servant; I have done that which it was my duty to do.' If we can say, 'all these commandments have I kept,' we are only at the best 'not far from the kingdom of God.' As soon as we take the path of ceaseless effort and sacrifice, we enter within it.

(2) In the second place, the sense of duty, to be complete, needs the recognition of the infinite claim of an Infinite God. It may be that the spirit in its own inward journey realizes the need of God, and through the earnestness of that sense of need finds its way to Him. It may be that God Himself, using some experience or influence of a man's life, lays hold upon him and bids him go forth to follow His leading to the end. In either case, it is this recognition of the infinite claim of an Infinite God that redeems and transforms the sense of duty. There can then be no danger of halting and stopping short, for God's claims summon us to a never-ending progress towards union with Himself. There can be no danger of self-satisfaction, for God's own perfection is the goal, and at every stage we realize how far short of it we come.

What we need to redeem and perfect the sense of duty is to remember that beyond what any standard of human opinion expects, beyond what 'England expects,' remains what God expects; that God can expect nothing less than the union of our mind and will with His; that this expectation can only be met by that entire sacrifice of body, soul and spirit which is after all our reasonable service; that to this Divine expectation we are kept true by the sense of our own unworthiness, which leads us ever to plead the Atonement and to accept the grace of Christ our Lord. It is only to him who honestly confesses 'we are unprofitable servants; we have only done that which was our duty to do,' that, after long service, is assured the Master's praise: 'Well done, good and faithful servant.' [1]

> Lead me, Almighty Father, Spirit, Son,
> Whither Thou wilt, I follow, no delay.

[1] C. G. Lang, *Thoughts on some of the Parables of Jesus*, 178.

My will is Thine, and even had I none,
Grudging obedience still I will obey.
Faint-hearted, fearful, doubtful if I be,
Gladly or sadly I will follow Thee.

Into the land of righteousness I go,
The footsteps thither Thine and not my own,
Jesu, Thyself the way, alone I know,
Thy will be mine, for other have I none.
Unprofitable servant though I be,
Gladly or sadly let me follow Thee.

The Consolation of Activity

Luke xvii. 14.—'As they went, they were cleansed.'

Looking back over our life we see that trouble has come to us from one or other of three different sources. We may be troubled about ourselves. We may be troubled about other people—our friends, our neighbours, our contemporaries, the world. Or we may be troubled about God—about life, that is to say, either on the large scale or as it has smitten ourselves in some poignant event. Another way of saying the same thing and of describing those three sources of private misery is to say that when we are troubled it is either about our sins, or about our misfortunes, or, ultimately, about the fact of death.

Any one of those three may assume for us such an aspect as to paralyse our personal life, bringing over us a kind of bodily sickness in which we come to a standstill. Until this trouble of ours is composed, and honourably composed, we are not free, we are not human, we are not in possession of ourselves; we are depressed and impotent by reason of our shame or our anger or our fear.

We are all of us aware how greatly it helps us on a day when something is lying heavily upon our spirit, simply to do something, to do anything, to shake ourselves from our lethargy, to protest against our gloom, to get up and walk—in short, to act. In the day of his trouble a man does not want *light*. He wants a motive; he wants to feel that life, notwithstanding, is still worth while. He wants, not an explanation, not an analysis of the situation, but an access of personal force, a wave of energy which shall commit him to some new action.

¶ 'O man,' he growls, 'who told thee that thou wast born to be happy? What if thou wast born to be unhappy? Lose thy happiness and find a greater thing, blessedness. Close thy Byron, open thy Goethe. There is no situation in life which has not its immediate duty. Life is solved by action.'[1]

But notice this. There is a noble use of this instinct, and an ignoble.

1. If, for example, in my trouble I do something, but simply with the purpose of enabling me for a little while to forget my trouble, I have, in fact, not done myself any good, but rather harm. I am like one who puts off an interview. It may be an interview with himself which, nevertheless, he cannot for more than a time escape. Or I am like one who, thinking about his debts, suddenly puts the grim business aside and goes off on a holiday, saying jauntily to himself, with one half of his mind—and it the poorer half—that things will be different when he comes back; deceiving himself.

We are dealing dishonourably with our trouble when we try to make light of it to ourselves, knowing all the time that we are seeking to deceive ourselves; when we deny that it is there and that it ought to be there; or when, acknowledging it to be there, we determine, nevertheless, not to think about it, and plunge into some kind of folly or self-indulgence in order to save us from the pressure of it. By such methods we may succeed in taking our mind away from some insistent thing, but we have done nothing, so far, towards the solution of it. This is the most disastrous use to which we can put a habit or practice which in itself may be entirely innocent: we may rush to it in order to drown care, as one might take strong drink in order to give him false courage, or to blunt the edge of his own thoughts. In such a case a man has abused and misunderstood the instinct of the soul—to escape from trouble in personal activity.

2. What that instinct ought to mean for us is that, when beset by any trouble, we must not lie passive under it; for that is the sin of despair, and despair, it may be, is the only sin. We must act—that is to say, we must believe in life rather than in what threatens and embarrasses life. We must believe in spirit, in personality, in God, in a final resource which can come for ever between us and the devastating power of obvious things. In short, the first

[1] Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*.

action to which the soul of a man is called in the day of his trouble is, *to believe*. Faith is a kind of action; indeed it is the most personal action competent to a man, for it is the action of his whole being. The same is true of hope. The same is true of love. In each it is the human soul driven back, it may be, upon its final resource, and finding there, to its own blessed astonishment, that for the first time it is truly vital and confident, ready to strike back at a world of contradictions.

It is action of this kind, with the motive and intention of faith, that alone can honourably heal a soul which life has wounded, that alone can honourably reinforce a soul which life, by some harsh event, has for the moment saddened and brought low.

¶ We have a proverb, *Solvitur ambulando*, which simply means that light comes not as we sit down waiting for it, eating out our heart. Light comes as we proceed. Applied to the formidable things in this life of ours—our own moral failures, the misfortunes which befall us, and the certainty of death—the proverb cannot possibly mean that life is solved by us going on *anyhow*, and not thinking much about it: for that is not true, and to say such a thing is simply to give way to agnosticism and the cynical spirit. It would be like advising a man who is in financial difficulties to 'take things easy, and everything will come right.' But things are not solved by letting them proceed, least of all the affairs of the soul. No; the truth of the proverb that a thing is solved by proceeding, applied to the deeper questions of life, is surely this: that the darkness of things is always accompanied, and may even have its source, in a stagnation and silence of the soul, and that the darkness of things will remain until our souls somehow receive energy from a region beyond things, that is, from God.[1]

Let us dwell much in the atmosphere of Christ's thoughts and words concerning God and life and all things; and it is promised, not, indeed, that all things will become clear, or that those whom life has maimed will cease to halt a little, or cease to lean upon a staff; but it is promised that, living day by day as seeing God who is invisible, we shall see Him more and more, and shall be saved from that bitterness which, and not doubt, is the true contrary to faith.

[1] J. A. Hutton, *Our Only Safeguard*, 195.

Gratitude

Luke xvii. 17.—'Where are the nine?'

The main interest of this story centres around this saying of Christ's and its meaning—'Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?' They have usually been taken to mean a rebuke to ingratitude, or the expression of Christ's surprise at a Samaritan's gratitude. But the first is wholly improbable, for He was not one to require gratitude, and the second is quite unlike Jesus; He would not be astonished at un-Jewish gratitude.

No, the interest of the phrase is in this, that it seems to have been the rapid, half-unconscious expression of Christ's surprise that *all* did not return to thank Him. He expected the ten to come back: only one returned, and almost in soliloquy the words came, the unpremeditated expression of His natural expectation, 'Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.'

Jesus was susceptible to gratitude. We should naturally infer this from the fact that He was a loving and true man.

Susceptibility to gratitude must be regarded as ranking men in the scale of being. The quickness, the instantaneousness of perception by which one detects what is kindness and favour is like sensibility in the eye. An artist's eye sees quicker, and sees more, than an untrained and common eye. It is like sensibility in the ear. A musician hears more quickly and hears finer things, and things more complex, than an ordinary ear. So the heart of gratitude that stands highest is one that detects all the finest lines of kindness and of favour, and detects them instantly—not upon reflection, not upon a consciousness of investigation, but by natural aptitude.

1. It is the fashion sometimes to disclaim gratitude. Distrust the man who really does that, for he has spoilt his heart. It is the habit of some to repel it, to check its utterance. We little think how cruel that is, and how unwise. It throws back on the heart of the receiver the burden of unexpressed thanks, and that is a burden we ought to bear with others as well as the burden of sorrow. To reject gratitude makes the grateful feel that the person who

helped them did not love them, or that there was no kindness at the root of the good done: and then his gratitude becomes a pain to the giver of it, and the kindness he has received an obligation.

On the other hand, it is very ugly to claim gratitude. That also proves that we are thinking more of our own goodness in giving than of giving because we love, and it is only frank giving without any notion of recompense which deserves gratitude. There are no claims so often impertinently made as the claims for gratitude, and none which so separate people from one another—and this because the claim is, at its root, unjust.

¶ I have known persons who have been suspected of undervaluing gratitude, and excluding it from the list of virtues; but on closer observation it has been seen that, if they have never felt grateful, it has been for want of an opportunity; and that, far from despising gratitude, they regard it as the virtue most of all incumbent—on others towards them.[1]

That was not Christ's way; He did not spoil the good He did either by rejecting gratitude, or by claiming it. He only showed, when He received it, the natural human joy He had in it, the frankest pleasure in accepting it. And this was a beautiful thing in Him.

2. Once more, if Christ's life and character were the image of God's life, this tells us that God takes delight in our thankfulness to Him, that it is sweet to His fatherly ear to hear the gratitude of earth, that He listens for and 'misses our little human praise.' For if we delight in gratitude, and no sweeter, purer pleasure, except that of giving, is on earth (in truth, it is correlative with that of giving), how much more must God our Father, who bends to ask for our heart, delight in it. He would not wish our love—and what is gratitude but love for love expressed?—did He not enjoy it.

And surely, however tried we have been, we have enough for which to give Him thanks. His the morning brightness and the quiet of the evening which have brought so often inspiration and stillness after the wind and storm of the heart: His the woodland and the rushing water, sailing cloud and mountain wind, which have so often brought their freshness to restore our hearts: His the power, the thought, the image, and the silent joy with which Nature has blessed our life: His, too, the love which has surrounded us from infancy, the little unremembered acts of kindness which have kept the web of life bright, however dark its threads.

Dials count sunbeams—man each cloud that lowers;
Thou who complainest of life's stormy ray,
Say, hast thou numbered thy serener hours,
God's little kindnesses of every day?

¶ Here is a story of Dr Whyte's pastoral work told by Dr Kelman:

'One poor old woman whom he visited had complained during the whole of twenty minutes about everybody and everything, and he had sat silent. Then he lifted his gloves and hat, and shook hands with her to bid her good-bye, saying only, "And, mind you, forget not all His benefits!"'[1]

3. And, lastly, there are few things which bless and soothe the life of others more, or do them more good, than the giving of thanks. It makes men feel that they are some use in the world, and that is one of the finest impulses to a better life. It cheers many a wearied heart with pleasant hope, and bids many a man who is sad in mood take courage. It is the soother of the world, and, like mercy, its work is twofold, for it blesses him who gives it and him who receives it.

¶ There is one influence of the greatest importance in regard to education—the personal influence of the teacher. This is a part of the pupil's environment which not even a millionaire can undertake to supply to his pet university. It is rather a thing to pray for, and to treasure when the gods send it to us.

The personal effect of teacher on pupil cannot be bought at a price, nor can it be paid for in any coin but gratitude. It is the possibility of earning this payment that makes the best part of a teacher's life.[2]

The nine went away, and gave no thanks, chilled the heart of the Teacher and Healer, and made His work more sorrowful; but he who returned healed the wound the nine had given, and redeemed their failure; for in his thankfulness he gave back to Christ His cheerfulness,

[1] George Eliot.

[1] G. F. Barbour, *Alexander Whyte*, 365.
[2] Sir Francis Darwin, *Rustic Sounds*, 95.

and the Saviour's day was brighter till the evening. It was much to do that, and the doer knew not what he did.

Have mercy, Lord !—how many voice the cry,
And suppliant kneel in hour of need !
Gladly receiving all that Love doth give
Then go, unmindful of His need,
By Whose sole power they live.

God's Failures

Luke xvii. 17, 18.—'And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed ? but where are the nine ? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.'

THE strangest feature of this incident is our Lord's unprotesting acceptance of the situation. One alone returns, while nine go their ungrateful way : and He leaves it there. He works no miracle on their diseased souls, such as He had done on their diseased bodies ; and He does not even remonstrate or appeal, though by either way He could have produced at least correctness of behaviour.

And, as Jesus did, God manifestly does every day. He sets right no visible defection by outward correction, and works no change of heart or direction of will by miraculous power. Day by day He makes His appeal of goodness ; and when that fails, He accepts failure. This is the problem we have to consider.

1. *God fails with great mercies chiefly because He fails with the common experiences.*—Even as an isolated lapse of an otherwise grateful humanity, this incident would be a painful revelation of the possibilities of human nature ; and only a cynic, one might imagine, would regard the action of these nine Jews as typical of mankind. Yet this ingratitude was no unique experience for Jesus, and He does not seem to have thought it exceptional in God's experience of His children.

Personal application to ourselves we should all resent. We may have been blind to many blessings when they were veiled by familiarity, but is it conceivable that a deliverance, impressive by its greatness, its suddenness, its transforming effect, should not stir our hearts to their depths ?

While we may reasonably be confident of showing better manners, can we be equally sure of feeling deeper gratitude ? Try, first, to imagine the actual thoughts of these Jews. As disfigurement fell from their faces, and renewed vigour surged through their veins, and hope soared aloft from its grave, they saw themselves once again amid all the interests, activities and ambitions of their old lives. But, at the thought of home, consider how it would flash upon them that their old life might not be waiting. Were they not dead men out of mind, their acquaintances forgetful, their offices assigned to others, their heirs secure in their possessions ? At the thought everything would be blotted from their minds except the need of haste to claim their place in the land of the living before time had wholly filled it with the interests of others.

If self-regard rightly hold the place they gave it, they had reason for attending to business first and gratitude afterwards. Are you sure that it is the order you think wrong ? Yet this it was that proved their action no mere lapse of a moment, but the outcome of lives habitually self-centred. The offence is thereby made greater, but is it not also brought closer to each of us ? A failure which springs from blindness to life's constant possibilities can be escaped only by those for whom life is no routine pursuit of self-regarding ends.

To the kindly self many good and beautiful things belong. It is a pleasant thing to behold the sun and the love in human eyes which shines in its light, and there are things which spring under its warmth, which are blessed to give as well as to receive. Yet it may still be merely a roundabout way of going inward from the gift to the receiver, and not a direct way of going outward to the Giver, thus making God's own goodness the supreme reason for forgetting Him.

Nor will it be otherwise in great deliverances, unless there is habitual returning to give glory to God for the common mercies. Think of the abiding wonder of earth and air, and 'the human face divine,' and home and kindred, and the joy of living and thought and aspiration, and of the greatest marvel of all, that for us they are common and continuous. If for this you have never returned to give glory to God, is it not a fond illusion to suppose that any deliverance in the world would be signal enough to stir your gratitude, or any experience poignant enough to 'stab your spirits broad awake' ?

Tender mercies, on my way
Falling softly like the dew
Sent me freshly every day,
I will bless the Lord for you.

Though I have not all I would,
Though to greater bliss I go,
Every present gift of good
To Eternal Love I owe.

Source of all that comforts me,
Well of joy for which I long,
Let the song I sing to Thee
Be an everlasting song.[1]

2. *God fails with life because He fails with the common religion.*—All the nine who went away were Jews; the only one who returned was a Samaritan. The position of the Jew in religion was truly privileged. How great the advantage was appears when we remember that the Scripture of the Samaritans was confined to the Pentateuch, the most ceremonial and least spiritual part of the Old Testament. Had this Samaritan's religion consisted in mere formal obedience and respect for ritual observance to secure temporal prosperity, we need not have thought it strange, seeing how he did not know the prophets and psalmists, who taught that God would have mercy and not sacrifice.

What sent these Jews off so hastily was the command to show themselves to the priest. No small part of their eagerness was the desire to return to their religious privileges. Nor need we suppose that, in their affliction, their religion had been no consolation. But it had not enabled them to understand how health could be loss without God, and even leprosy gain with God. There is only one religious discovery of value. It is that God is in all events, even when they are not of His causing but of our sins, and that, by His purpose and succour, they may all be turned to good. As soon as they heard the injunction, 'Go shew yourselves to the priest,' all their pride of religious caste blazed up in them. They did exactly what Jesus told them to do. In spite of their hurry to go home, they would go round about by the road of ceremonial purification. They obeyed to the letter, but it was the letter which the prompting of true gratitude made the Samaritan disregard.

In contrast, the Samaritan, ignoring the letter, found that a very imperfect religion opened the heavens and made his face radiant with joy and gratitude. It also brought him back to Jesus Himself, to find in Him the full revelation of the Father which would turn for him henceforth all life's experiences into a manifestation of a love which would enable him in all things to give thanks.

3. *God fails with religion because He fails with the common intercourse.*—While the Jews obeyed the letter, the Samaritan disobeyed, being prompted of his own heart and led by the spirit which makes alive.

As he turned, they could not fail to see him; and, as he shouted his praise, they could not fail to hear him. But by the name of stranger Jesus called him; and He did not use the word carelessly. From the moment they were healed, the one thought of his companions was how he might henceforth be to them an utter stranger. Their adversity had compelled them to put up with this alien bed-fellow. But how would it stand with them, they reflected, should their fellow-worshippers learn of this contamination? Here was a providential way of escape, without harsh explanation or painful parting. The Samaritan had turned back, and the whole affair could be settled simply by hurrying on.

Your Samaritan, too, is always the person from whom your instinct of superiority would make you flee; and your treatment of him, above all else, decides how God can reveal Himself to your soul as the living God, and what He can make out of you by means of your fellows.

¶ Some time ago I heard a group of children sitting on the street curb and singing a missionary hymn:

The little black baby that rolls in the sand,
In a country far over the sea,
Is my African brother, and Jesus loves him
Just as he loves you and me.

At first I was amused to hear them singing there. Then I fell to meditating on how easy was the problem presented to them so long as the little black baby was rolling in the sand in a country far over the sea. They did not have to deal with him individually. If they helped him at all they did it in general and at long range through a great organization. But what a difference when our 'African brother' no

[1] Anna L. Waring.

longer rolls in the sand in a country far over the sea, but moves into our neighbourhood.[1]

Christ's own supreme test is how you deal with one of the little ones. The little one is ignorant, but ever seeks light; lags behind, but never ceases to aspire; has many moral falls, but ever stumbles forward; gropes often in the dark, but ever seeks the light; is not a shining example, but is wholly sincere; often lacks wisdom, but the instinct of his affection is always right. As you treat Him, you show whether God has been able to teach you that there is nothing here with any of us save God's erring child and His unwavering love.

In one sense God leaves it there, in the sense that He cannot alter His ways of appeal. But He would not be a Father at all if this meant that His purpose of good could end. Did we say, as sometimes it has been said, that in the Cross of Christ God has done all He can do, and, love having justified itself, justice must take its course, should we be thinking adequately of the heart of God? In which way would the Cross be the highest manifestation of the Father? Would it be as the last demonstration of mercy before abandoning the sinner? Or would it not rather be as the supreme assurance that His mercy never could be exhausted?

Seven vials hold Thy wrath: but what can hold
Thy mercy save Thine own Infinitude
Boundlessly overflowing with all good,
All lovingkindness, all delights untold?
Thy Love, of each created love the mould;
Thyself, of all the empty plenitude;
Heard of at Ephrata, found in the Wood,
For ever One, the Same, and Manifold.[2]

The Silence of the Kingdom

Luke xvii. 20.—'The kingdom of God cometh not with observation.'

1. Jesus came to found a kingdom. Now, the founding of a kingdom has ever been accompanied with noise and force. All this world's dynasties have been born on the battlefield. The clash of weapons, and behind it the more dreadful clash of proud and selfish aims, has ever been the cradle-song of every power that has arisen. Not that mere might has ever been a decisive thing in the world's history. Right and truth have always had real dynastic power in the larger life of the world. But their light has had to break upon men through the smoke of the battle, and even men of steadfast moral purpose and of real spiritual aim have been wont to look upon outward force as having some necessary place in the vindication and establishment of religious truths. But the last kingdom, the Kingdom of God, stands over against all this.

¶ John Woolman did a work that moved the world; but he did it when nobody was looking. He did it without snapping a twig or rustling a leaf; and he did it in such a way that nobody suspected him of having done it.

One day, as he sat at his desk in the store at Mount Holly, a strange thing happened. 'My employer, having a negro woman, sold her, and desired me to write a bill of sale. The man who had bought her stood waiting. I felt very uneasy at the thought of writing an instrument of slavery for one of my fellow-creatures. I was so afflicted in my mind that I told my master, and the Quaker who had bought the woman, that I believed slave-keeping to be a practice inconsistent with the Christian religion.' The more Woolman pondered the matter the more it worried him. He resolved to give up his position and to trudge from settlement to settlement urging the Quakers to wipe their hands of the traffic in slaves. And, as Mr Trevelyan says, his *Journal* shows how this humblest and quietest of men used to travel round on foot, year after year, among those old-fashioned American Quakers, stirring their honest but sleepy consciences. A Quaker Socrates, with his searching, simple questions, he surpassed his Athenian prototype in love and patience and argumentative fairness. And when the Friends found that they could not answer John's questions, instead of poisoning him or locking him up as an anarchist, they let their slaves go free. 'Incredible as it may seem,' continues Mr Trevelyan, 'they asked no one for compensation; but then the Quakers always were an odd people!' And thus that agitation began which, more than a century later, culminated in the emancipation of the slaves.[1]

2. Let us see what the silence of the Kingdom

[1] H. E. Fosdick, *Twelve Tests of Character*, 176.
[2] Christina G. Rossetti.

[1] F. W. Boreham, *A Faggot of Torches*, 89.

really means. Perhaps it is better to miss it altogether than to misunderstand it, and therefore misuse it—this fact of silence. Some hail with joy any word concerning the silent coming of the Spiritual Kingdom. It saves them the strain of listening for it. It enables them to say, Lo, it may be here even now, though they have done nothing to prepare the way for it or to try to bring it in. It is so easy to misuse the mystery of the faith. So easy, too, to be merely vague, and to pass unconvinced and uncommitted amid the positive claims and challenges of the eternal things. God forbid that we should so construe the silence of the Kingdom as to find in it something that lessens the urgency of our spiritual endeavour, that puts a premium on our incapability, that condones our most culpable failures and that veils our shame.

O Patient Christ! when long ago
O'er old Judea's rugged hills,
Thy willing feet went to and fro
To find and comfort human ills—
Did once Thy tender, earnest eyes
Look down the solemn centuries,
And see the smallness of our lives?

Souls struggling for the victory,
And martyrs, finding death was gain,
Souls turning from the Truth and Thee,
And falling deep in sin and pain—
Great heights and depths were surely seen,
But oh! the dreary waste between—
Small lives, not base perhaps, but mean.

Their selfish efforts for the right,
Or cowardice that keeps from sin,
Content to only see the height
That nobler souls will toil to win!
Oh shame! to think Thine eyes should see
The souls contented just to be—
The lives too small to take in Thee.

Lord, let this thought awake our shame,
That blessed shame that stings to life,
Rouse us to live for Thy dear name,
Arm us with courage for the strife.
O Christ! be patient with us still;
Dear Christ! remember Calvary's hill,—
Our little lives with purpose fill! [1]

3. But perils such as these only arise out of our misinterpretation of the silence of the Kingdom. We need to learn at least this much, that the silence of the Kingdom is part of its positive and elemental truth. It is a term in its eternal message and ministry to the heart of the world. The key to its meaning and treasure is faith in the unseen and unutterable realities, that dwell at the heart of the gospel. We need ever to be refreshing our minds and hearts with the great thoughts of the Kingdom—the facts that focalize, for us all, and for ever, the Light of the World. They are pardon, peace, holiness, and sacrifice. They deal with the fundamental needs of human souls and the ultimate basis of personal integrity and social integration. They move, do these great things, with passionless authority and unfaltering mien amid the profundities of our spiritual nature. The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation, because these things are the very life and being of it.

4. Though it cometh not with observation, this Kingdom of God in the earth, yet is not its silence unobtrusive and lowly. Though it may be likened to the springing corn, yet its silence is not merely germinal and evolutional. The Kingdom comes with superb glory and with regal sanctions and claims. It is not a vast evolution, it is a vast revolution. But the glory is not always girt with hosannas, nor is the great change effected and sealed in the way that men in their least spiritual hours are prone to think it should be.

Right at the heart of things His Kingdom works, right through the heart of things His Kingdom comes, right in the heart of things His Kingdom is being for ever established. There is a place of toil and tumult where we follow our Captain; but if we are to follow Him there, we must first meet Him and clasp His hand in the place of faith and vision, the place of silence; and know that we go forth to no doubtful issue, for we have the handclasp of Him whose victory is already won.

[1] Margaret Deland.

The Kingdom Within

Luke xvii. 21.—'Behold, the kingdom of God is within you.'

As we read these words we think of them largely as meaning the indwelling presence of the Spirit in the soul for peace and strength. And that is

true. But as our Lord spoke them He was thinking of something else. He was thinking of this new power of the Spirit by which men and women who receive it into themselves become authoritative and ruling and controlling, going out to conquer and to rule in His name.

Go back to the old story of Genesis. We see man set by God in the centre of the created world, not as a being apart from it, but as its natural centre and ruler. The kingdom of Nature is within him, and all nature, silently and somewhat reluctantly, owns him as its lord and master. As you follow the course of man's gradual and increasing mastery of nature you see how at each step there is the consciousness of its rightful claim to mastery and authority, and yet painfully at each step—in the air, by sea and by land, in the laboratory as in the contact with nature—man pays the price of his mastery: and yet as you watch him there is a consciousness in him that he meets nature as the ultimate victor, and defeat is but the means of a new discovery. Never is there any doubt in his mind as to the ultimate issue. Now, put that side by side with the Kingdom of God within the soul and see how completely different are the mind and attitude of the Christian soul.

1. First, think how little the dynamic power of faith enters into our minds. 'Those men who have turned the world upside down' can hardly be said of us Christians to-day. The general conception of the Faith is that it is a settled order of life which is not expected to run against the accepted standards and ways of living. The world does not regard it as a power with which it must reckon, a force which cannot be ignored or flouted. Faith is energy! Always and everywhere faith is force. Take an advocate at the Bar. His duty to his client will endow him with a certain force and persuasiveness of speech, even though he has no confidence in the inherent justice of the cause he advocates. But let it be further assumed that he believes his own brief, that he has a deep, unshaken confidence in the rectitude of his cause, that he has entire and absolute assurance in his client, and what tremendous heritage of power attaches itself to his attack or defence? It is faith that tells.

2. Secondly, we lack that positive force of the Kingdom in our own souls which was so evident in the New Testament. As we do not expect victory in the world, so we do not look for the triumph of the Spirit in our souls. The most that we expect is that the spiritual evils in our lives will be kept under control and reduced to some kind of outward decorum and decency.

We are deeply interested just now in Spiritual Healing, by which we mean the healing of the bodies of men. Well, of course, any way in which the Power of God is evidenced in the lives of men is of inestimable value. But are we not getting a little too much interested in our bodies? Are we not in danger of forgetting that there is within the reach of all of us that true spiritual healing of the spirit of man by the Spirit of God? After all, it is for this supremely that the Church stands confronting the world; for the healing of the whole man. That was the claim of Christ, that is what the Church still claims for Him.

We need to assert within ourselves the redeeming power of Christ. The Gospel of Christ is not a palliative nor a sedative for the pain of the soul; it is a ministry of health, of wholeness, of positive cure and redemption. So the positive power of Christ ought to be as evident in the soul of man as the healing of diseases in modern surgery and medicine. We have to make it clear and plain to the eyes of men that He can do what He claims to do.

If the Kingdom is to become vitally effective, we need a new mind about it. There must be new courage of faith and adventure. We are in possession, but not in conscious possession, of the Kingdom, and we are like some tribe in the heart of Africa living in poverty and too often in internal strife, while under the ground we tread lie untold riches of wealth.

3. How are we going to take possession of the Kingdom?

(1) First, we have to recover our mind. That is no easy task. That is largely the cause of the trouble. We have not the Mind of Christ; we have not the consciousness of conquest. If we are to realize the Kingdom in our souls, we must let that Truth which is in Christ soak through into our souls and minds. Let, then, the Gospel penetrate into your mind; just as the rain soaks through the earth until it reaches to the wells which lie deep below the surface and causes them to rise; so this rain from

heaven will cause the wells of living water in our souls to rise and give water to a thirsting world.

(2) Secondly, we must pray. Yes, but in a real and more vital way. The prayer of the Kingdom is no weak petitioning of God; it is the soul in active co-operation with the living Christ, in obedience to His ways, in intelligent understanding of His mind. It is the lifting up of the soul above the material world of failure and disappointment and anxiety. The man of science knows that there are laws of nature which, if he works along those lines, will give him assurance and practical force. He investigates, he searches, he makes experiments, because he knows that there is a real Kingdom of Nature, if only he can get to it, and having discovered it, he uses the laws for his purposes. So prayer to us is no weak or tentative act; it is the Kingdom within us putting out through us its powers of thought and action in union with Christ, in whom that Kingdom is revealed, and only waiting for our appropriation.

¶ Meredith, who 'learned to live much in the spirit, and see the brightness on the other side of life,' found prayer to be the most practical of realities. But prayer is more than saying prayers. It is fellowship with the Highest, and without it we cannot live as befits those who walk in a world where there is truth to seek, evil to fight, and sorrow to heal.[1]

¶ I remember once, in the early summer of 1884, seeing a sight in India which made a permanent impression on my mind. In the modern busy street in Calcutta, called Bow Bazaar, in which the Oxford Mission House used to stand, I saw by the side of the tram-line a man, stark naked, with chains round feet and hands. He was lying flat in the dust, measuring his length on the ground. He was a fakir or devotee of some sort, and I was assured that he was going to travel in this manner all the hundreds of weary miles which intervene between Calcutta and the sacred city of Benares. My first feeling was, I fear, one of disgust and contempt at the superstitious folly of the man. But I hope it was soon overtaken and checked by a consideration both worthier and with more of humility in it—the consideration, I mean, that he, in his belated ignorance of the character of God and of the way to serve Him, was taking a great deal more pains about his devotions than I was in the habit of doing with my better knowledge.[1]

[1] J. Fort Newton.

4. When that assurance comes, what follows? *First*, a simple confidence that you are here with power to meet the difficulties, that God is on your side, now that you have been awakened to see what is in you. Your difficulties will be no longer any other than His. You and He together face them in sure, quiet confidence, and you are giving to Him all your strength and faith. He is behind each difficulty, and the unravelling of that will be not only a victory, but a new truth about Him. That is the Power of the Kingdom—not acquiescence, but strong, purposeful action and freedom from all anxiety, for the issue is sure.

Secondly, there will come that which is the characteristic of the Kingdom—creative force, initiative, spontaneousness. Only by the rediscovery of the Kingdom can there be a new world. The needs of the world are urgent, we have the remedy within ourselves. Hear, then, the call of the Kingdom, not so much in the world outside, but in the Kingdom in your own soul. Get at your own life first with its sins, its problems, its difficulties, and realize the resources within yourself, and ally yourself with Christ, and for you there will come not only strength, but also that new force by which the Kingdom within you will tell on your world.

¶ Take with you these words dug up some years ago in a tomb in Egypt, words which men tell us were spoken by Christ Himself: 'Let not him that seeketh cease until he find; and finding, he shall enter the kingdom; and having entered the kingdom, he shall rest; and resting, he shall reign.'

Endurance

Luke xvii. 21, 22.—'The kingdom of God is within you. The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it.'

1. We are told that the Pharisees asked Jesus when the Kingdom of God should come. Strictly speaking, this implies that the kingdom of God was not there. It was purely in the future, and the Pharisees scanned the face of heaven and earth for tokens of its advent. They were literally on the look *out* for its

[1] Bishop Gore, *Prayer, and the Lord's Prayer*, 3.

approach. The answer of Jesus means that this attitude is wrong to begin with. The kingdom of God does not come with observation. It does not come in outward events to which you can point saying: Look here, or Look there. The Kingdom of God is within you.

¶ I felt that whatever befell me I was indeed a part of Himself; not a thing outside and separate; not even His Son and His Child; but Himself.[1]

This is the first thing we have to learn about the Kingdom: it is spiritual, and its seat is in the heart. Its felicities are enjoyed there, its loyalties are displayed there. So far as the world of rational and moral beings is concerned, it is wherever human hearts and wills bow before God as King. It can only come as God wins our souls for Himself and realizes a sovereignty on earth through the hearts and wills of His children—through our faith and love, our gratitude, joy and obedience.

2. All this is plain, but there is something in the very conception of a Kingdom that tends to carry us past this inward and individualistic point of view, and our Lord seems to have foreseen that this something, craving another satisfaction, would assert itself in the minds of the disciples. He said to them, 'The days will come when ye will desire to see one of the days of the Son of man.' Some have thought this meant that in the trying future which awaited them the disciples would wish they could have Jesus with them again for a day—that is, have Him back among them—as the Highland soldier badly led is said to have cried, O for an hour of Dundee! But that is wrong. A day of the Son of man does not mean another day of Jesus' company as they used to enjoy it in the days of His flesh; it means a day of the glorious sovereignty predicted for Him in the book of Daniel. They will long to see the time when the sovereignty of God is visibly and unchallengeably established on the earth, when war and all its horrors will have ceased, when there will be no more drunkenness and lust, no more oppression and cruelty, when the will of the Father will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And it is with reference to the desire to see one of these days that our Lord utters the solemn and startling words, 'Ye shall not see it.'

[1] A. C. Benson.

We must not run away with the idea that in the lips of Jesus these are words of despair. Nothing in all the Gospels is more indubitable than Jesus' assurance of victory. He does not say that there never will be days of the Son of man, but only that when the disciples, under the stress of trials, long to see one of them, they will not see it. The state in which we live here will always make demands on faith and patience. Even when we have learned that the Kingdom of God is within us we shall still need to say to ourselves, He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.

> Surrounded by unnumbered foes,
> Against my soul the battle goes!
> Yet though I weary, sore distressed,
> I know that I shall reach my rest.[1]

When Jesus lived among men, evil was strong enough to inflict the Cross upon Him; and nothing in His teaching, or in the New Testament anywhere, encourages us to expect in this world a state of things in which the Christian will be exempted from the cross. Let moral progress be as great as we can conceive, yet we will never come in the flesh to a condition in which goodness will be charmingly easy, and the following of Jesus the path of least resistance. The progress of the world is not in good only, or in bad only, but in the antagonism between the two: the Christian's watchword in it to the end is, The combat deepens: on, ye brave.

¶ Lockhart tells this story in his *Life of Sir Walter Scott*: One night in the city of London—the night being one of most dismal fog—a man was urging his way through the darkness. A stranger to our human joys and to the inexhaustible resources of the human heart in God would have said, beholding that wayfarer—what a picture of man stealing through the impenetrable darkness of this world! Nonsense! The man was reciting to himself, as he went, the closing words of Marmion. He was keeping up his heart with a song. He was facing the darkness by the force of his indomitable soul. He had reached the line, 'Charge, Chester, charge!'—the second last line of the stanza. He had just uttered the words when a voice answered him out of the darkness, completing the line, 'On, Stanley, on!'—and

[1] Gerald Massey.

another wayfarer in the fog, another pilgrim of eternity, emerged from the mist. Under a lamp they met, these two. The fog had brought them together, and the poetry. They looked into each other's face, grasped hands, and passed on, each on his own high-hearted way.[1]

3. Part of the trial of life, which makes people long for the great decisive change meant by the coming of the Son of man, is its monotony, or at all events its uniformity. When Jesus looks into the future, He does not see that in this respect it is going to be different from the past. As it was in the days of Noah, as it was in the days of Lot, so shall it be in the Christian dispensation. They ate, they drank; they bought, they sold; they planted, they builded; they married wives, they were given in marriage. How could they help it? All these things were imposed upon them; they were involved in the inevitable structure and working of human society. Yes, but how inevitably temptation comes with them all to the end, as it came with them at the beginning. What possibilities of evil are inseparable from a life so constituted! If there is eating and drinking, there may be gluttony and drunkenness; if there is buying and selling, there may be over-reaching and covetousness; if there is planting and building, there may be display and pride; if there is marrying and giving in marriage, there may be infidelities and sensualities. And over and above this or that, there is the power of the whole order in which we live to benumb our spiritual nature, and to make us drift on from day to day without unity of purpose, without concentration, without the effective recognition of the sovereignty of God in our life—perhaps professing to believe in progress, but not having the Kingdom of God within us. 'As it was in the days of Noah, as it was in the days of Lot.' This it is against which we are warned by Jesus.

In spite of all the superficial sameness and monotony, however, there is a deep difference in men's lives within. It was so in the ancient days to which Jesus referred. Life went on as usual in the time of Noah, but the flood came when it was due, and Noah entered into the Ark, and the godless were swept away. Nothing could exceed the solemnity with which our Lord points the application of this for His disciples. It is as if He said to us, You are living in a world in which moral distinctions seem to be ambiguous or evanescent; all lives, you say to yourselves, are alike; all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation; there is nothing here but eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, marrying and giving in marriage. It is not true, though it is the temptation of our present state and the secret thought of many hearts.

¶ It is said that one of the loveliest of Beethoven's melodies was built up out of a rude rustic rhythm that was wafted one night to the great composer's ears as he lay in bed in a country inn. A passing wayfarer was humming to himself a few notes of an unfinished folk-song as he went on his homeward path. The rhythm struck the composer. He noted it straightway in his note-book. He bent his mind over it with the laborious patience which was so characteristic of his genius. He turned it one way and another. He shot it through with new harmonies and strange discords. He varied it in a hundred different ways, until at last the old country tune became glorified into something altogether wonderful. It was the old and yet infinitely, gloriously new. All had been made new by the intermingling with it of the melodies of the master.[1]

'I say unto you, In that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other left.' Taken means taken by the Son of man, taken to Himself, taken to the glory of the Father; and left just means left. No outward circumstances could be more nearly identical than those of two men sleeping in one bed, but there may be an infinite and eternal difference between them. What is it that makes the difference? It is that the one has the Kingdom of God within, and the other has not.

While it is possible to live in this world of spiritual reality, and to have the Kingdom of God and all its blessings within, it is not easy. That is the meaning of the parable of the Importunate Widow. The widow stands for the wronged and oppressed people of Christ, wearying and crying for one of the days of the Son of man—longing for the vindication of God and His cause in a cruel and wicked world. Will the King ever take to Himself His

[1] J. A. Hutton, *The Winds of God*, 103.

[1] W. Mackintosh Mackay, *Bible Types of Modern Women*, 193.

mighty power and reign? We have the word of Jesus for it that He is surely coming to His sovereignty.

We know there shall dawn a day—
Is it here on this lonely earth, or, yonder, worlds away?
Where power comes full in play.

But who shall be taken then, and who shall be left?

¶ O God, so fill us with Thy grace and enlist us in Thy work, so manifest the might of thy word to us, that the ideal of Thy perfect kingdom may shine as bright and near to us as to Thy prophet of old, and that we may become its inspired preachers and ever labour in its hope.[1]

Lot's Wife

Luke xvii. 32.—'Remember Lot's wife.'

Half the impressiveness of this brief, sharp sentence lies in its immediate context. Christ used it to inculcate—what? He is speaking of the time and manner in which He will come again; whether that signifies the end of the world or the destruction of Jerusalem. In either case He predicts that the great day will arrive when men are least expecting it, because sunk in their ordinary occupations, eating, drinking, buying, selling, marrying and being given in marriage. Such would be the danger that wise men would instantly escape for their lives. Christ is speaking in pictures, no doubt, but pictures often have a quite definite meaning; and here the one thing certain is that they stand for stupendous facts.

Now whatever men might do at other times, a crisis of this unheard-of character would surely sting them into promptitude. Delay would then be madness. Nothing except instant and decisive action is of any use when the house is burning, and the roof just going to fall in. And yet, as He looked down the years, Christ saw that a loud warning was necessary against infirmity of purpose even in that thrilling hour. So, in three words, He points in Old Testament story to the folly of this woman, and the doom that fell on her after she had left the burning city. We need not dwell on the particulars. Both in Genesis and here the light is focussed on that one point, that she turned and looked back, with a mixture of regret and disobedience, and so proved herself utterly hopeless. And Christ takes her experience—her act and her swift fate—and uses it to caution the irresolute.

This picture, then, etched so sharply on the Bible page, may well help to illustrate for us truths that should be burned into our minds and our memories.

1. Note, first, that *God saves all He can.* For Lot was not saved alone, in mercy that overlooked all others beside. His wife's deliverance had been cared for too, and measures taken to secure her with the rest. Almost against her will she was hurried so far out of danger, and the mountain-road, with its hastening fugitives, stretched out clear before her, when, in that one glance behind, her incurably corrupt nature came out, and the stroke fell.

In other words, she was nearly saved, and would have been wholly saved had that heavenly rescue-party had their will. That teaches a lesson worth pondering. We look out into the great future sometimes, asking ourselves hard questions about the eternal destiny of men; but, however eager our forward gaze, we return always at last perforce to this conviction, that for us to venture to predict the lot of any specific individual is an utterly hopeless undertaking. It is not for us to determine the merits of a fellow-sinner. As Mr Gladstone once put it, 'Nothing grows upon me so much with lengthening life as the sense of the difficulties, or rather the impossibilities, with which we are beset whenever we attempt to take to ourselves the functions of the Eternal Judge, and to form any accurate idea of relative merit and demerit, good and evil in others.' That, indeed, is the one fixed point in our ignorance; but it is balanced, and more than compensated for, by another fixed certainty, which comes right out of this old story and many another Scripture; namely, that no one will be lost at the end who is willing to be saved. God would give the whole world to redeem any one of His children. Already he has given more, immeasurably more, than the whole world, when he freely delivered up His Son for us all, and bought us at a great price.

[1] George Adam Smith.

Christ's hands upon the cross are nailed apart
In a straight line outstretching left and right;
And the divine impulsions of his heart,
Pointing asunder, never can unite.

So the mind reasons. But a bolder sense
Tells us the straight line bends at last in space.
Those arms, though seeming fixed in impotence,
Hold us and all things in their wide embrace.[1]

2. Note, secondly, *how men hanker after old sins*. We do not forswear our allegiance to our divine Master: but we parley with our old friend the enemy in memory of former days. We persuade ourselves to give our spiritual life a holiday, and return to Egypt for a while, remembering the leeks and garlic and forgetting the lash and the bricks. The ghosts of former sins rise up and we follow for a time, meaning to return when we have sipped the forbidden cup.

They come as ghosts and phantoms not to stay;
  As fleeting visions of the night they shine,
  Or daylight trances, aping the divine,
That we may bow the knees to them and pray:
Dishonoured outcasts of the dolorous way,
  They lurk and show the perilous design
  Their Dead-Sea apples and their wormwood wine,
Glories that rust and treasures that decay.

They come as ghosts and phantoms. Yet the lure
  Is hard for hungering spirits to repel.
Old gods are these, of ancient rights secure,
  Craving the thrones from which they erstwhile fell—
Still finding secret worship, homage sure,
  And smouldering hot desires that serve them well.

At times the situation is slightly different from that, though similar enough in results. Some personal habit is harming our life, impeding or even poisoning our fellowship with God; we condemn it, only not severely enough to break with it once for all. Or there is a special department of life—our business, our reading, our imagination—which we have never yet subdued to Christ's authority, with a fault in it which we permit to fester in our character like a running sore. Or there is some friendship, some alluring intimacy, which we know ought either to have its tone altered radically or be put a stop to; yet the needful word is left unspoken. Now that, or other things like that, when found in a Christian man, is to be moving slowly out of the City of Destruction and casting wistful looks behind.

But let us distinguish here, and avoid anything like injustice. We are not speaking of a sin that a man is honestly fighting and doing his best to overcome; say the weakness of evil temper—a far graver and more guilty business than many people imagine who think it very hard that their neighbours should, as they say, constantly 'provoke them' into ill-nature. Still, owing to natural disposition that sin may beset a Christian man to his bitter grief, and now and then take him by surprise in spite of prayer and vigilance. Only, the difference is that he is saddened, not gladdened, by his sin. It is hateful and repulsive to him; more than that, he has made a covenant with God to destroy it, and he knows thankfully, deep down in his heart, that some day it will veritably be destroyed.

¶ The Gospel, if it is to be a Gospel of peace to this longing soul of mine, must give a Saviour who will deliver from the power of sin. I want to have done with it. When God's people crossed the river Jordan, God broke down the bridge behind their back; and there is a startling truth in the Lord's declaration to Israel: 'Ye shall return this way no more'; between them and the land of Egypt and that wilderness in which they had journeyed so long there rolled the waters of Jordan. So God has broken the bridge behind our backs; there is to be no more compromise with the world, no more flirtation with sin, no more indulgence in forbidden fruit, for between us and the former state of sin rolls the river Jordan of eternal separation.[1]

On the other hand, the man aimed at in the text is one who looks back on sin kindly, remembering its charm, and longing to enjoy it just once more. Lot's wife had fled out of the blazing streets with the others, but her heart stayed behind, and at last it tugged so hard that she could go no farther. So some evil thing may be clung to and loved even in a certain kind of religious life. It does not need to be a

[1] C. W. Stark, in *The Personalist*, April 1926.

[1] *Walker of Tinnevelly.*

glaring wrong, about which people make a public outcry; but however small, if we cling to it with a silent tenacious defiance of God's will, it can arrest the progress of the Christian character, and eat out the heart of it until the hollow shell is only a ghastly hypocrisy. Sometimes in a wine-cask there is an unsuspected growth of fungus, that sucks up the liquor like a sponge, until no wine is left, but only a foul growth. Just so men may go on, hiding from themselves the fact that cherished sin is absorbing the main interests of their life, and diverting thought and attention and love from Jesus Christ.

That looks as if it were very difficult—so to deceive one's own heart—but it is not so difficult after all. We know far too little of ourselves, and of the spiritual processes going on deep down within us, chiefly because we never care to know much. Besides, we find it very hard to think evil of ourselves. Conscience may be soothed to slumber, or bribed not to speak. If only we keep up that attitude of ignoring dangerous symptoms, it may happen ultimately that we move about the world unconscious of a mortal disease, which every one else sees in our face. Moreover, the love of sin can become a fierce tiger-like appetite, that will take no refusal.

¶ A famous doctor used to speak of a man who came to him once or twice about his eyes. On the first visit, the physician questioned him as to his drinking habits, and on the second told him that unless he became an abstainer instantly he would be blind in six months. The man passed his hand over his face, walked to the window, and was heard to whisper, as he looked out over the garden, 'Then farewell, sweet light.'

3. Lastly, note *how sin can be committed in desire.* At first sight, perhaps, one might suppose this woman had been dealt with very hardly; and we are tempted to say that the punishment was out of all proportion to the crime. But, if we feel that, it is because we fail to realize all that her longing glance implied. It was a clear proof that, if she could, she would have turned back to her old haunts; and that, indeed, so far as will and choice were concerned, she had turned back already. So there are instances where God cannot but take the will for the deed.

Do you remember what Christ said to the traitor on that last night, just before giving him the sop? 'That thou doest, do quickly.' Why that word *doest*, in the present tense, with reference to a crime as yet uncommitted? Why does Christ thus take the sin for granted? Because He saw that in Judas's soul the die was cast, the action signed and sealed by deliberate open-eyed volition. If by some strange providence Judas had fallen dead ere he reached the street, the guilt of that sin already determined on would nevertheless have been his all the same.

Once the mind has been made up finally, and the preparations are in order, then, after that, the sin is as good as committed in God's sight, and so far as our character is concerned. For remember what makes a man; not the movements of his hands and feet merely, not the deeds we see, but the interior volitions and desires, the longings, good or bad, to which he yields himself up, and with which he identifies his will. And this again reminds us that no force or influence which remains outside of a man, and is only mechanically applied, can ever make him the person he ought to be, or save him from the haunting treachery of his own worse nature. The Bible's message tells of the only cure of the weakness. Let us get Christ into our heart, by going to His Cross for cleansing and to His Spirit for restraint; let us thus get His will to become our will and His thoughts our thoughts, and we shall have learned the true plan by which the living spring of conduct will be made and kept pure, and sin will be abhorred.[1]

The Danger of Looking Back

Luke xvii. 32.—'Remember Lot's wife.'

1. Our Lord saw in the incident from old Hebrew history a living lesson for His own Church; and there is no less need of the warning to-day than there ever was. That pillar of salty deadness has never melted from our midst, and it perpetually tends to form in every community and in every life. We know very well that persons of an undue conservatism, who insist on looking back and telling us that the former times were better than these, do tend to turn into mere pillars of salt—columns of

[1] H. R. Mackintosh, *Life on God's Plan*, 115.

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bitterness. Refusing to look forward they soon become unable to move with the moving times and change with the changing conditions. They would rather go back to Egypt with all its servitude and bitterness than march forward to any promised land. They are like Prince Charlie after the tragic throw of Drummossie Moor, and unless some firm and friendly hand seizes their bridle reins, worse things will befall them yet. Especially, said Jesus, must Christians have 'the rapture of the forward view.' Our line is not a prudent conservatism but a holy boldness.

There is a wonderful spirit stirring in our midst in these days which is proving itself by many tokens to be none other than the eternal Spirit of God bequeathed by Christ to His Church for her guidance, and never wholly absent from the world of forward-looking men. The great thing for us is to be believers in that Spirit and to be His allies. Jesus said that He would send this Spirit to *lead* His people into all truth. Leading is a gradual process; it means moving from one theological and social camping-ground to another. The one thing that can never happen if we are really following the living and leading Spirit is that we should ever stand still in idleness or contentment or religious stagnation.[1]

¶ Nay, when God Himself turns us not hither and thither, when He sends us no changes for us to receive and consecrate, be it ours to create them for ourselves, by flinging ourselves into generous enterprises and worthy sacrifice; by the stirrings of sleepless aspiration, and all the spontaneous vicissitudes of holy and progressive souls; keeping always the moral spaces round us pure and fresh by the constant thought of truth and the frequent deed of love.[2]

¶ The mountaineer thinks that when he has climbed this mountain he will be content, but once he has achieved it he must try another. The musician, the artist, the author thinks that after he has done this piece of work he will be content, but no sooner is it done than the outlines of another shine before his eyes with an alluring glow. The business man promises himself that with these years behind him or this accumulation in his hands he will stop, but there is always that one more thing he wants to try. And as for character, our feet are set there on an endless road that leads over the mountains and through the sunset into the hope of an eternal morning. Human life at its innermost nature is not an enterprise that you ever can get done; it is an endless adventure in becoming.

> Find progress, man's distinctive mark alone,
> Not God's, and not the beasts': God is, they are,
> Man partly is and wholly hopes to be.

That is the secret alike of our movement and of our worth.[1]

Our guide is not a pillar of salt, stationary, backward-looking, and dead. It is a Pillar ever moving forward to new and better things through constant change. Sometimes that Pillar seems to our holden eyes like a great mass of cloud, dark, obscure, and hiding much from our eager gaze. Sometimes it takes the form of a consuming fire, a conflagration in which things are burned up—but not the things that really matter. But it is always a very Pillar of the guidance of God, glowing, living, moving, contagious. It means that if only we have the faith to follow we shall be led on to better things—a truer theology, a more vital religion, a nobler state, a better social future and a worthier people to inhabit it, on to a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

2. Bishop Andrewes was preaching on one occasion before Queen Elizabeth, and took Lot's story as his theme. 'There are in Lot's storie,' he said, 'two very notable monuments of God's judgment, the *Lake of Sodome* and Lot's *Wife's Pillar*. The one, the punishment of *resolute sinne*; the other of *faint virtue*.' There are many who escape from the slough of resolute sin who fall into the snare of irresolute virtue. And they consequently play a losing game all along. They set out to make their way to something better, but they keep looking back, and so know neither the sweets of sin nor the safety of the saints. All the good they seem to be in the world is to be permanent warnings of how not to do it. Lot's wife had set out and had escaped so far; her pillar stood many good furlongs from the destroyed city. But the passers-by never thought of

[1] H. L. Simpson, *The Intention of His Soul*, 144.
[2] James Martineau, *Hours of Thought*.

[1] H. E. Fosdick.

her as one who had had the foresight and the courage to come out, but as the member of the party who looked back. It was her irresolute virtue which the after-ages remembered, not the initial wisdom of her setting forth.

There are many persons of 'faint virtue' who will gladly admit that God led His Church safely onward up to a certain undefined point in history. Certainly He was manifest in the days of the apostles and of the Early Church. Not hesitatingly will such persons admit that they can trace the working of the Holy Spirit in the times of the Fathers, of Luther, and of Knox. Those were great days; and as they think of them they sing

> O God, what time thou didst go forth
> Before thy people's face;
> And when through the great wilderness
> Thy glorious marching was.

But since then the glorious marching has degenerated into a feeble and hesitating limp along, with crutch and bandage, torn banners and quenched music. So these backward-looking faint-hearts think.

'Remember Lot's wife.' Remember what happened to irresolute virtue at a moment when everything depended upon looking and moving forward unhasting and unresting. If God has brought you out in your experience into any wide and airy place, do not turn back again into the stuffy little house you left. Let him that is in the field not turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Life is movement under the eye and the leadership of God. If they are trying to tie you up in some narrow little house of orthodoxy when God has brought you out into His wide open field, don't let them. Life is progress. Life is what we are alive to. To be alive only to money and the main chance and number one is to be petrifying already into one more warning pillar. Life is love and beauty and sonship with God. 'It is not what the hand grasps but what the eye sees and the heart feels that makes life great.' Are there not enough warning pillars, rigid through cramp of the soul, 'stiff with money,' or starched with pride, or hardened in selfishness and unbelief?

3. The one thing the Church and nation cannot do is to live on its past, just as the one thing which the individual soul cannot do, and keep its spiritual health and vitality, is to live on an inherited religion. During the great Coal Strike some years ago the country was living for a time on the stored-up supplies in the great yards and bings and railway depots. It seemed all right for a day or two. But the inevitable result was a gradual slowing down of the industries and activities of the whole country. Such is the danger of living on an accumulated piety. Inevitably there comes a slacking off, a fatal slowing down. And you remember how, when the miners got to work again, the country seemed to leap forward into exhilaration and life and joy. So must we keep digging deeper and ever deeper into the 'unsearchable riches,' quarrying our own spiritual fuel, feeding the furnaces with fresh supplies.

Character and Circumstances

Luke xvii. 34, 35.—'I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left.'

THESE words are taken from the great discourse in which our Lord speaks of His Second Coming. In that sermon He declares plainly and emphatically that a day is coming in which He will take unto Him His great power and reign—when He will reveal Himself to the world as God's chosen King. That day, when it comes, will be as sudden and as unmistakable as the lightning flash which shines from one part of heaven to the other. That day will overtake a world to a large extent unready. Men will be so immersed in their secular pursuits as to be heedless of the things that pertain to their eternal peace. The consequence is, the day of the Lord will be a day of revelation, discrimination, and separation. This discrimination will separate the closest of friends and will sunder the most intimate of human relationships. 'The strangest separations,' as Dr Plummer remarks, 'will take place between comrades, according as one is fit to enter the Kingdom and another not.'

Now, there are three truths assumed or plainly taught in our text. They are these: (1) The fact of a coming discrimination. (2) That discrimination will be made according to character. (3) Character is, in the last resort, quite independent of circumstances.

1. First, there is the fact of *a coming discrimination.* The day of our Lord's Revelation, according to the unvarying testimony of Scripture, will be a day of crisis, a day of separation, a day of judgment. Even when He was on earth Jesus acted as a principle of division. His ideas made the world into two camps. It was strange the dividing power they had. When one of them fell into a company of men, into a city, into a nation, it acted on them as an electric current acts on water; it separated their elements, and separated them with uniformity and constancy, according to their good or evil character: Christ's thoughts decomposed a compound world. And when they had divided men, they deepened that division by awaking passion in their hearts, passion for or against the thoughts; and men so stirred revealed their thoughts. While He lived, that was plain enough. Men could not meet Him without disclosing what was in them. The Pharisee dropped his cloak of hypocrisy, and stood forth the loud-voiced enemy of justice and mercy. The Sadducee could not help revealing his unbelief.[1]

And the same thing is to happen on the world-wide scale when He appears in glory. His appearance in Palestine was local. But then, every eye shall see Him, and the result of the vision will be separation and judgment. Divisions will take place among the most closely connected. Comrades and intimates will be sundered, for 'There shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other left.'

2. The second great truth is this: that *discrimination is according to character.* This truth is not stated in so many words, but it is clearly implied in the text. Two men are asleep in the same bed; two women are grinding at the same mill. As far as outward appearance went, there was nothing to choose between them. And yet in each case one was taken and the other left. What was the reason for the discrimination? Unless we are to write it down as accident or caprice, it could only be due to this: a difference in moral character. One loved the Lord and was ready for His coming, and the other did not.

We divide our people into classes, according to their external condition. We speak of the 'upper classes' and the 'lower classes'; we speak of the 'leisured classes' and the 'labouring classes'; we speak of the 'professional classes' and the 'business classes.' All these divisions—and most of them are very stupid—are according to a man's external condition. Then we split ourselves up into parties, according to our political preference, and according to our ecclesiastical convictions. Now these differences, which loom so large before our mortal eyes, and which settle our place in human society, count for nothing at all in the eyes of God. He pays no heed to them. The Lord looketh not upon the outward appearance, He looketh upon the heart. The final discrimination is not according to earthly rank or wealth or learning, but according to moral character. Those who love Christ in their hearts shall be taken; those who lightly esteem Him shall be left.

3. The third truth suggested by our text is this: that *character is, in the last resort, independent of circumstances.* This is a truth to be enforced and brought home to heart and conscience because it is a truth which is tacitly, if not openly, challenged and denied. One effect of the enunciation of the evolutionary theory was an altogether new sense of the part played in the origin of species by heredity and environment.

According to the dictionary, environment means the 'surrounding conditions by which living forms are influenced.' The doctrine of environment tells us that the precise character of plant or animal is conditioned and determined by the circumstances in which that plant or animal is placed. Think, for example, of a grain of wheat. There are potencies latent in that grain, but before the potencies become actualities the grain must find its proper environment. Locked up in a drawer, the grain remains a single grain and nothing more. But sown on the face of the brown earth, that grain will spring up and grow, first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. It grows and multiplies only when it finds its proper environment.

This, of course, is a fact of observation, and is freely and frankly admitted. But some people, with a passion for uniformity, and denying the possibility of any break in Nature's processes, assert that the law holds good also of

[1] S. A. Brooke, *The Spirit of the Christian Life*, 159.

man. Man, according to them, is just a part of Nature, as the plant or animal is, and, like them, he is under the sway of Nature's laws. They tell us, therefore, that a man is made by the circumstances in which he is placed. Given a certain environment, a certain character is bound to result.

No one would say that environment has no influence whatever upon character. But it is not true to say that a man's character is at the mercy of circumstances. The fact that the materialist philosopher forgets or ignores or denies is that man is a spiritual being, that he is dowered with the gift of freedom, that he has the regal power of will. He knows that he is making choices every day of his life. He knows that, continually, alternatives present themselves to him, and that he selects the one and rejects the other. And by these choices character is made. There are certain things with which we are born. We are born with a certain physical constitution; we are born with a certain colour of hair and eyes; we are born with a certain family and home. These things we cannot help.

But we are not *born* with a character. The utmost we are born with is a disposition or a bias. We *make* character. And how do we make character? We make it by the choices and decisions of every day. We start with the raw stuff of character. But what sort of a character it shall actually become—whether unto honour or unto dishonour—depends on the shape we give to it. And we make and shape character by our acts, our choices, our decisions. 'Occasions,' as Thomas à Kempis says, 'test a man but do not make him.'

> Little and great is man:
> Great if he will, or if he will
> A pigmy still;
> For what he will he can.[1]

That is why, out of the same set of circumstances, two men will issue who will be poles apart in character. If it were true that circumstances and character stood to each other in the relation of cause and effect, identity of circumstances would issue in identity of character. But all history and experience tell us that is not so. Two brothers grew up in the same home in London. One became Cardinal Newman, a Romish priest, and the other became Francis Newman, the extreme liberal theologian.

¶ There is a spot in the Rockies on the Canadian Pacific Railway which is known as the Great Divide. It is the backbone of the Continent. Two rivers rise together there, but one bends east and the other west. They rise together, but one river turns east and finds the sea in Hudson Bay, and the other turns west and pours itself at last into the waters of the Pacific Ocean. Together at the start, all the miles between the Atlantic and the Pacific divide them at the finish.[1]

> So from the heights of will,
> Life's parting stream descends,
> And as a moment turns its slender rill,
> Each widening torrent bends;
> From the same cradle side,
> From the same mother's knee,
> One to long darkness and the frozen tide,
> One to the peaceful sea.

Circumstances do not create character. We make character by using circumstances. In the last resort the secret of character is within.

> You may grind them both at the selfsame mill;
> You may bind them heart and brow;
> But the poet will follow the rainbow still,
> And the other will follow the plow.

Let no one therefore shelter himself behind this plea of environment and whimper that he would have been a better man if he had had a better chance. It depends not on your circumstances, but on your will. Is your will set on right? Is your will set on following Christ? Then you shall tread the powers of darkness down and win the well-fought day. For it will not be your will alone pitted against the difficulties of your surroundings; it will be your will strengthened by the Almighty will of the Infinite God.

The Doom of Corruption

Luke xvii. 37.—'Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.'

PROBABLY our Lord's words about the body (the 'carcase,' as it is in Matt. xxiv. 28) and the vultures were a kind of proverb in common

[1] Christina Rossetti.

[1] J. D. Jones, *The Gospel of the Sovereignty*, 271.

use. That proverb enshrines a condensed picture. We are shown a wide, bare, sand-strewn desert. Across the sands a caravan of camels is making its way. One of the camels is spent to its dying. It has fallen behind the others, and the master of the caravan, with Oriental callousness, leaves it to its fate. The camel stumbles on, but its lowered head, glazing eyes, and sobbing breath are the signs of the end. Upon the horizon there is seen a speck, small, black, swiftly growing larger. It is a vulture, soaring in the distant blue, speeding to the dying camel. It has been drawn from afar by the sight of coming death. Another, and another, and still another swiftly follow. From all quarters of the heaven they bend their flight, and whirl round the doomed camel. But they do not touch him. He has fallen, but death has not yet set the seal upon his life. His breathing is an agony; his movements are convulsions. But when the heart has ceased to beat, and the camel which was a living and breathing creature has become a dead body, the vultures swoop down and make him their prey.

This proverb, with its vivid picture, states a law. It is a law both in the natural and in the spiritual world. That law is that wherever there is death and its corruption the offices of judgment and destruction find their opportunity. Corruption has only one doom, and that is to be destroyed. That law operates on both a larger and a smaller scale. It can be seen in the history of the centuries and in the events of a single life. Let us mark its workings in three spheres. First: in the life of the nation. Second: in the life of society. Third: in the life of the individual soul.

1. *The law of judgment in the life of the nation.*—Consider it in the two most outstanding and dramatic instances in secular history. Think of Rome, with her imperial dominion, her splendour of temple, and senate house, and amphitheatre, the rule and sway of a people who made the earth to tremble with their tread. But, despite the moral elevation of many of her teachers, a decline set in. It began, as all moral decay begins, at the heart. It continued in an increasing apathy and a baser degradation through slow centuries. It was manifested in luxury and profligacy, in arrogance and cruelty. Rome became the city of a nation whose life centred in the Colosseum and its games, from whose broad gateways an idle people passed out to scramble for the bread they had not earned. At last Rome passed into moral death. Its government was a tyranny; its religion an hypocrisy; its common life so base that the record of it pollutes the mind. The people had become corrupt, and Goth and Hun and Vandal swooped down upon the city, scattered the stones of her palaces, looted her treasures, and took her dominion out of her hand.

Think of it in a more modern instance, that of Paris, into whose life France had poured her strength for generations. What a brilliant, joyous, resourceful people dwelt in Paris towards the close of the eighteenth century! How noble in learning, how adept in science, how skilled in art were the people of that beautiful city! But how blasphemous, how pitiless, how foul, was the life lived in her picturesque streets! Honour became a mere etiquette, truth a jest, chastity a byword. All history knows the issue. The vultures bred in her own bosom gathered around her, and in the hour of her death they swept down upon her.

That is the inescapable law of God's moral government. Corruption has a doom that is inevitable. As soon as the symptoms of moral death can be marked in a nation, or an empire, the vultures of its destruction begin to gather round it.

2. *The law of judgment in the life of society.*—We are looking at it now as it operates on a smaller scale and in a narrower sphere. We are considering it as it can be observed working within the circle of our own life and experience. Here is a commercial company, or a financial enterprise, such as that of a business firm, an industrial organisation, or a bank, into whose management crafty and dishonourable methods have crept. The moral blight goes on, the unscrupulous management continues. At last fraud has become the habit of the business, and the end is reached, in that most ominous and dreaded word—bankruptcy—and the law of judgment is seen. The firm has become a carcase, and the vultures which have been gathering together swoop down upon what is left, and they pick the bones white.

Look at this truth in the more intimate rela-

tionships of life and in the social intercourse of society. Think of the man whose moral life has been descending to the way whose steps take hold on hell. He has been tampering with honesty and trifling with purity. He has been yielding to temptation and giving way to self-indulgence. As the moral degradation goes on, the day of exposure is reached, the double life is discovered, and the rottenness of the man's soul is laid bare. Then the vultures of society gather together. They swoop down, and all the baseness of his deceit, all the meanness of his hypocrisy, and all the nastiness of his life are exposed and detailed.

This is a disheartening and terrifying truth. But it is under a solemn law of God's ordering, for judgment, even at the hands of man, is God's strange work. Yet let none of us needlessly play the vulture. Let none of us be the scandal-monger, the man or woman who gloats over another's fall, and revels in the details of his vices. There are public journals, and there are reckless books with large issues, in which the swoop of the vulture can be heard. There is a better part to play. There is that grace which hushes its speech about the man who is down, even when he has wilfully dug the pit for his own feet. But there is a still nobler service. That is to be pitiful, and in due season, speak the brave word of counsel and stretch forth the hand of help.

¶ When editing the *Cornhill Magazine* Thackeray was appealed to by a constant succession of men who had failed in life, and were in the direst straits of poverty. They knew the largeness of his heart and the grace of his generosity. He was aware that too often they had come to their state of destitution by their own wastefulness and folly. Yet he never uttered a single word of condemnation. He stepped in not only to relieve in the last extremity, but to help and to send a message of cheer, long before the lowest depth had been reached. 'No day passes,' he writes, 'but that word *misericordiam* is used. Day and night that sad voice is crying for help.' Then there comes the outburst of his compassion as he sends his gift, 'God help us! how am I to answer this perpetual cry of our brethren in distress?' Time and time again the message and the gift were repeated, and when at last the man sank altogether, Thackeray's voice was silent.

3. *The law of judgment in the individual soul.*—There is a decline and fall in the history of the soul, as well as in that of an empire or a society. It may be marked merely in a single infirmity, or manifested in an unusual and ashaming frailty. But it may pass on to repeated and more daring wrongdoing. Habits which are yielded to become a chain. Passions acquire strength and become a torture while they degrade. The imagination riots in pictures of shame. Then the vultures begin to gather. But it is not until a lower level is reached, and until a moral apathy has set in, and the man is, as Paul says, 'past feeling, given over to work all lasciviousness with greediness,' that moral death takes place, and then the vultures swoop down upon their prey.

¶ Recall the record of Heine, the apostate Jew, dying for eight years on his 'mattress grave,' in Paris. How splendid was his genius! How singular and how fascinating was every word he wrote! How clear to the end was his intellectual insight! In those last years, when he lay in a helpless paralysis, his powers put on their completest strength. Yet all who dared to visit him marked his callous moral degradation. They were sometimes roused to a moral shame at his unscrupulous passion, his attacks on his enemies and on his friends, his sensuality, his bitter mockery of all things pure, his savage irony, his cruel laugh of satiated revenge, his wit, so often blasphemous, at times obscene. One who loved him and served him wrote, 'Imagine the smile of Mephistopheles passing over the face of Christ—Christ draining the dregs of the chalice.' As he reached the end some who stood beside him were driven to the conception that his revolting outbursts were simply the echoes of the tearing of the vultures of remorse within his ignoble soul.[1]

This may seem a sombre message. But it is a message with a twofold and most moving appeal. No nation, no community, no society, no undertaking, no individual soul need pass down the way that leads to destruction and the coming of the vulture. The meaning of the gospel, the reason of the coming of the Word, and the purpose of the grace of God in Christ, are to lay an arrest upon those who are walking in the broad way.

[1] W. M. Clow, *The Evangel of the Strait Gate*, 295.

'Would a man 'scape the rod?'—
Rabbi Ben Karshook saith,
'See that he turn to God,
The day before his death.'

'Ay, could a man inquire,
When it shall come!' I say,
The Rabbi's eye shoots fire—
'Then let him turn to-day!'[1]

The Battle-field of Prayer

Luke xviii. 1.—'Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.'

Our Lord's words may mean that men are always to pray and never to faint in prayer. Or they may mean that men ought always to pray and they would never faint even when antagonisms rear themselves like awful mountain ranges between them and their goal. It is probable that both interpretations are equally true and that both are included in the Master's mind and purpose. For the cardinal matter is this: the heavy emphasis which Jesus Christ puts upon the ministry of prayer as a predominant means of grace. 'Men ought *always* to pray.' Such is the fervent pressure of the Master's word. And what He urged others to do He was always doing Himself. He prayed *always*.

¶ Clement of Alexandria recognizes the necessity of setting apart certain times of the day for prayer. But the seeker after holiness, he says, must learn 'to pray in every place, not, however, publicly or for all to see; but in every sort of way his prayer ascends, whether he is walking or in company or at rest or reading, or engaged in good works; and though it only be a thought in the secret chamber of the heart, while he calls on the Father in groanings which cannot be uttered, yet the Father is nigh at hand, even before he has done speaking.'[2]

¶ I very seldom venture to kneel at prayer in secret. At night it leads almost invariably, and very speedily, to sleeping on my knees, and even in the morning hour, I know not how, recollectedness and concentration of heart and mind are usually quickened in my case by a reverent standing attitude as before the visible Master and Lord, or by walking up and down, either in-doors or, as I love to do when possible, in the open air. A garden may prove a very truly hallowed oratory.[1]

Let us consider one or two primary matters concerning this mighty business of prayer.

1. The ministry of prayer is not entirely one with the exercise of petition. Prayer and petition are not synonyms—two names for the same thing. If the realm of prayer finds its symbol in some noble estate, then petition is like one field in the landscape. And there are seasons of prayer when we need not be in that particular field at all. Our spirit may be wandering in other parts of the wide domain. This is not to disparage the mighty prerogative of petition, but to say that it is only a part of our spiritual inheritance.

Thou art coming to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring.

Yes, and there are seasons when we would come to the King, burdened with intercessions, and spread the world of our necessities before the favour of His grace. But we are coming to more than a King—to a Father; and Fatherhood is larger than Kinghood, just as home is larger than a throne. A king may have gifts at his disposal, he may have honours and benefits and offices to confer upon his subjects; but fatherhood moves in a circle of intimacies and shared secrets, even in the matchless commerce of truth and grace and love. When prayer turns into this marvellous realm it is not so much a suppliant, laden with petition, as a wondering child walking in the revealing companionship of the Father in heaven. No, prayer is not always petition; sometimes it is just communion.

2. If prayer is not always in the form of petition neither need it be always in the form of words. There is a very vital part of prayer which can do without the vehicle of words. We can escape from the burden of the limitation of words.

¶ In the *Little Flowers of St Francis* there is a story which tells how King Louis of France came to visit Brother Giles and how the two saints, after the embrace and kiss, held long fellowship together without either uttering a word.

[1] Browning, *Ben Karshook's Wisdom.*
[2] *Stromateis.*

[1] Bishop Moule, *All in Christ*, 82.

Quietly and reverently we put ourselves into the Presence of God, we collect our scattered consciousness in the sense that God is near, and we come before His Presence. How is the Presence revealed? Who can say? Are there any means or methods which men and women have practised in the realization of the Presence of the unseen Friend? Yes there are, but there are almost as many ways as there are people who have practised them. Some call in the aid of a devout imagination, and in the secret place they realize a face, even the face which was unveiled to us in the Nazarene. Horace Bushnell led his spirit into a certain bright luminousness in which the Presence of the Lord was veiled, and he communed with Him in the light. Others have nothing of this kind at all. They just recall themselves into God's Presence and without any image of form or any sense of light they know and feel that God is near. Quietly say to yourself that the Eternal God is near who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ our Lord, and you will realize that you are in the presence of God. And, as you realize it, introduce in that Presence anything which concerns you and in which you have a vital interest.

Suppose the vital interest be your own child. Well, then, set yourself in the sacred silence, with a sense that you are near your Lord, and then, with alert imagination, bring your child into the holy place. See him there, hold him there. And what are you doing? You are establishing vital currencies between him and the Divine Presence, and you can do it without the ministry of words.

It may be some personal habit which constitutes your vital concern. Or it may be some particular piece of business. It may be some loss which you have suffered, or some great gain which you have made. It may be one of ten thousand things. Introduce your interests to the sacred Presence of the Almighty. See them there, and hold them there, and, whether it be with words or without words, you are carrying out something of the Master's counsel when He said, 'Men ought always'—in everything and everywhere—'to pray and not to faint.'

3. It is in the field of prayer that life's critical battles are lost or won.

(1) *We must conquer all our circumstances there.*—In prayer we bring our spiritual enemies into the Presence of God and we fight them there. Have you tried that? Or have you been satisfied to meet and fight your foes in the open spaces of the world? If, like Bunyan's pilgrim, we encounter Apollyon on the exposed road, and begin to combat there, we shall be sadly beaten, and he will leave us bruised and broken by the way. Our resource is to get him immediately into the field of prayer and engage him there. The struggle was going against Bunyan's pilgrim until he changed the manner of his fighting.

Lord Fisher once said, 'Compel your enemy to fight you on your own drill ground.' Yes, indeed, and when we fight the world and the flesh and the devil on the drill ground of prayer, we have a certain victory.

(2) *We must conquer all our troubles there.*—It very frequently happens that many of our troubles lose their fictitious stature when we bring them into the Presence of the eternal God. They shrink when we set them in a large place.

¶ Mr A. C. Benson puts it in this way: 'There were moments when one seemed baffled and powerless, when one's own strength seemed utterly unequal to the burden; prayer on such occasions did not necessarily bring a perfect serenity and joy, though there were times when it brought even that; but it brought sufficient strength; it made the difficult, the dreaded thing possible.'

Many an anxiety looks gigantic until we set it in the holy field of prayer in the Presence of the Lord. And there are other things which seem enormous and overwhelming until we set them in infinite relations. Sometimes a grave seems so big that it appears to fill the world. There is nothing in the world but the grave. When we see it on the fields of communion and in the glory of the light of the risen Lord, captivity is led captive, as death itself is buried in the eternal life of God.

Even when some of our troubles remain, as indeed they will, it is on the fields of prayer that we get above them. We have a very familiar phrase which is suggestive. We say, 'Under the circumstances!' But why should we be under them? Why slaves and not masters? Why under and not above? It is on the field of prayer that we get our circumstances beneath our feet.

4. But prayer has larger relationships than

any of these. We can bring the burdens and necessities of humanity into the sacred Presence, and become a point of vital contact between God and the human race, an inlet through which the Divine life flows into the veins and arteries of humanity. That is no idle figure of speech. Every man is an inlet through which clean or unclean energies pour into the general life-pool of the human race. We cannot help it. Our points of contact determine the character of our contributions, and if our supreme contact is with God in the communion of prayer, we become open channels through which the blessed influences flow into human fellowship. And so the prayer-ground is the common ground of racial enrichment.

Oft I think my prayers
Are foolish, feeble things; for Christ is good
Whether I pray or not . . . and then I stop
And feel I can do nought towards helping men,
Till out it comes, like tears that will not hold,
And I must pray again for all the world.

And not Faint

Luke xviii. 1.—'Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.'

Many a time, in our own experience as sworn disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, the temptation comes to us to faint. Perhaps it is the vision of self—never a consoling and uplifting vision to the sons and daughters of God. Perhaps it is the pressure of difficulty; outside, as well as inside, there are a thousand things to damp and dismay. Perhaps it is the flight of time; *that* smothers and kills a host of high resolves, of thankful thoughts, of inspiriting ideals. And thus we faint.

Yes; but let us bless God that His remedies to check and heal and banish the fainting are always near and always sufficient.

1. *We meet the vision of self by the calling in of Grace.*—'As we have received mercy,' says St Paul, 'we faint not.'

When did we receive mercy? When we were as bad as we could be. When we were not dying, but dead in trespasses and sins. When we could not utter a syllable in our own defence, or move a finger for our own recovery and release. Nobody except God in Jesus Christ would have compassionated us. No other would, or could, have devised and performed the tremendous task of redeeming those who were sunk so low. But He did it. He was not deterred by our black undeservingness. Let it be that, in ourselves, we continue capable of all failure, all perversity, and all evil. We examine our souls; and we are confronted by disabilities which seem ineradicable, doubts which are ever suggesting their scepticisms and negations, promptings to many unworthy compromises with a world that is totally antagonistic to Christ, indolence and cowardice and procrastination and pride, motives and desires and tempers and purposes which are anything but heavenly. O, the spectacle is humbling enough. It will be fatal to let the examination become over-scrupulous; nothing but despair lies along that path. We must counterbalance and correct the vision of self by the vision of the Love which self at its worst was not able to affright and drive away.

God's mercy did not speak its final word when it forgave us at first through the shedding of Christ's precious blood. To this instant it remains available, efficacious, and free. Once it was the medicine of the atoning Cross; now it is that of the long-suffering and prevailing Spirit; and it would be hard to determine which of these two is the more invulnerable. Men and women who have received mercy ought never to faint again. Against all disquietudes they should call in the Grace that is omnipotent.

2. *We meet the pressure of difficulty by the falling back upon God.*—'Men ought always to pray'—it is the Master who speaks now, and not the Apostle—'always to pray, and not to faint.'

Endurance is the crowning quality,
And patience all the passion of the saints.[1]

¶ Writing to Professor Denney, J. P. Struthers says: 'Preached lately on "Walking and not fainting"—George Adam Smith's idea of the climax being found in the commonplace. I like the promise—"Not faint," which means everything, especially when one reads earlier, "The

[1] J. R. Lowell.

Creator of the ends of the earth *fainteth not.*" So it is a big word.' [1]

'When obstacles and trials seem like prison-walls to be'; when literature is often hostile and poisonous, and science discovers no trace of the living Lord in the works of His hands; when society has its laugh and its pity for the people whose treasures are behind the veil; when the very Church is cold and unsympathetic—then is the time to make much of God, to throw ourselves into His Everlasting Arms, and to link our powerlessness with His infinite and unchangeable powers.

¶ Dr De Witt of Princeton writes impressively of Jonathan Edwards and his 'immediate perception of the spiritual universe as the reality of realities.' God, he says, became vivid to Augustine through the mediation of Augustine's experience of sin. He drew near to Dante through Dante's love of Beatrice. He taught Calvin His absolute and universal sovereignty through Calvin's revolt from the sovereignty of the human head of an earthly Church. But He spoke to Edwards mouth to mouth and face to face. 'Except the apostle called by eminence "the Theologian," St John the Divine, I know no other great character in history,' Dr De Witt asserts, 'of whom it can so emphatically be said that, when he "breathed the pure serene" of the spiritual world, he did so as native and to the manner born.'

If we but practised the Presence with some little degree of Jonathan Edwards' sureness and immediacy, our hands would not hang down any more, nor our knees be feeble. And how shall we acquire the habit, and possess ourselves of the talisman? How, but by prayer. By getting alone into our chamber, with the door shut, and there pouring out our souls before Him, and lingering in His company till we are aware of no one but Himself. When we fall back upon God, we do not dream of fainting. In darkest shades, when God appears, our dawning is begun.

3. *We meet the flight of time by the looking away unto Jesus.*—'Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners,' the writer to the Hebrews says, 'lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.'

Time is against the Christian. Time can chill. When his salvation was new, what a horror he felt at sin! what vows his will registered! what a tender, delicate, ardent, vehement kindness was the kindness of his youth! But the weeks, the months, the years have stolen imperceptibly and ceaselessly on; and airs and depressions and fatigues of the prison-house have begun to insinuate themselves into the heart which exulted then, and meant to exult to the last, in the marvel of its freedom.

¶ In his *Autobiography* Mark Rutherford tells of his fierce struggle with the drink fiend. 'On one never-to-be-forgotten night he resolutely put the glass from him and went to bed having drunk nothing but water.' 'But,' he continues, 'the struggle was not felt just then. It came later, when the first enthusiasm of a new purpose had faded away.' [1]

But here is what neutralizes and defeats the dulling influence of time, so that it shall wield over us no soporific and paralysing bewitchment; to consider, and to be ever considering afresh, the Jesus who climbed the Hill of Reproach for us, and who nailed Himself for our sakes to the accursed Tree.

That will do three things. (1) First, it will make us ashamed of the notion of reverting to the ease and indifference of the life we have left, or of faltering because of the hardships of the life to which we have been called; what, we shall ask ourselves, is our severest suffering compared with the sorrow, the desolation, and the death which our Ransomer bore?

(2) And then it will re-establish our love for Him who first loved us and so loved us; deny Him, return to anything He disapproves, refuse anything which He appoints and gives!—we shall recoil from it as a sheer and hateful impossibility.

(3) And, lest these should not be enough, it will constrain us to receive more and more continuously the light and life of the Holy Ghost, who reveals this Jesus, who magnifies Him, who binds us to Him by cords which nothing will relax and destroy. We do not, we dare not, we cannot faint when it is our constant custom, our refuge 'at morning-break and through the live-long day,' to look away unto Jesus Christ.

[1] *Life and Letters of J. P. Struthers*, 220.

[1] F. W. Boreham, *The Luggage of Life*, 76.

The Doctrine of Delays

Luke xviii. 4.—'He would not for a while.'

This parable, as the Scripture itself tells us, was meant to teach us importunity in prayer. Christ, who was tempted in all points like as we are, and who had wrestled through many a stern hour of intercession, knew well how the heart is prone to faint when the heavens we pray to are as brass. The judge in this parable is a venal and villainous creature, the kind of man who is still the curse of the East; and any one but Christ might well have hesitated to compare his actions with those of the Almighty. But a son can take large liberties sometimes: he will run the risk of being misunderstood. There is no parable that so assures us of the perfect freedom that Christ had with His Father; a servile courtier would not have dared to speak so. Love can be very silent and yet happy: but love has the boldest and the bravest of all tongues. There are hours when only love dares to say nothing. There are hours when only love dares to say everything.

1. The text suggests *the great problem of Divine delay*.—The judge delayed to act—'He would not for a while.'

The delays of man may be infinitely vexing, but they are nothing to the delays of God. God's delay meets us in Nature, when men may be gaunt with famine, yet God will not hurry the harvest by one hour. It meets us in life, where all that a man has toiled for often reaches him seemingly just an hour too late. It meets us in judgment, when wrong-doers live and flourish till the cry from the altar rings in heaven, 'How long?' Above all, it meets us in the sphere of prayer. How many patriots have prayed for their country's weal, yet the years rolled on, and there was no arm to save. How many mothers have prayed for their sons or daughters, and been well-nigh broken-hearted by delay. What a world of experience there is, and how the centuries vanish, when we hear the cry of the Psalmist, 'O Lord, make *haste* to help me!' It is as if his faith were flickering out into its ashes, under the torment of delay.

2. But the very fact that the Psalmist prayed that prayer shows that *the problem is a very old one*. And we are so knit together in this our strange humanity, so touched into strength and courage by companionship that often just to know the world-old pressure of a burden gives a certain ease in our own bearing of it. Noah felt it when he built his ark and the sun still shone in a heaven of unclouded blue. David felt it—had he not been anointed to be king? yet here he was, hunted as an outlaw on the hills. Paul felt it when he prayed, and prayed again, that the Lord would take away the thorn out of his flesh, yet he woke in the bright morning to his work, and for all his prayer, the thorn was with him still. Do not say, then, 'God has forgotten *me*,' because the burden of delay weighs heavy on you. We are brought into the fellowship of all the saints, by what we suffer as well as by what we gain.

He prayed, but to his prayer no answer came,
And choked within him sank his ardour's flame;
No more he prayed, no more the knee he bent,
While round him darkened doubt and discontent;
Till in his room, one eve, there shone a light,
And he beheld an angel-presence bright,
Who said: 'O faint heart, why hast thou
resigned
Praying, and no more callest God to mind?'
'I prayed,' he said, 'but no one heard my
prayer,
Long disappointment has induced despair.'
'Fool!' said the angel, 'every prayer of thine,
Of God's immense compassion was a sign;
Each cry of thine, "O Lord!" itself contains
The answer, "Here am I"; thy very pains,
Ardour, and love and longing, every tear
Are His attraction, prove Him very near.'
The cloud dispersed; once more the suppliant
prayed,
Nor ever failed to find the promised aid.[1]

It is well to remember that the higher we rise, the more intense does the difficulty become. The very measure in which we feel its weight is a kind of test of the things for which we seek. One summer perfects a flower in the field; but to perfect a child takes twenty or thirty years. And the very fact of the Divine delay in calling into their amplitude these childish faculties is a proof that there is more of heaven in the child

[1] Jalaluddin Rumi, in *A Little Book of Eastern Wisdom*, 49.

than in the most exquisite flower God ever fashioned. A nation of men which is to serve the high ends of heaven is never fashioned hastily. Through pilgrimage and war and struggle and blood and tears, by heroism that oft seems unavailing and sacrifice that is like water spilt, it becomes the polished instrument of God. Delay, then, tends to become more marked the higher you rise in the Creator's purposes. The joy that cometh in the morning might be far less thrilling, had not the weeping from which it springs endured all night.

3. Nor should we forget *the moral training of delay*. The one sure way to ruin a young child is to give it immediately all for which it asks; and to the Ancient of days, the oldest are but as little children.

So weak is man,
So ignorant and blind, that did not God
Sometimes withhold in mercy what we ask,
We should be ruined at our own request.

Think of Christ's treatment of the Syrophœnician woman when she came to Him praying for her daughter. All her motherhood was on her lips and in her eyes as she pleaded and interceded for her child. Do you think it was cruel of Christ to answer her never a word? Do you think it was harsh to speak about the dogs? How much we should have missed, and how much Christ Himself would have missed, had it not been for that practice of delay! It was that which called out in her her fine persistence: her faith, her wit, all that was brightest in her. She might have been anybody when she began, but she was a woman among women when she ended. Work reveals character, but so does waiting. We need to be tested to prove if we be worthy just to receive and use the thing we crave. So it often is that God delays, and will not answer us, and keeps us waiting.

4. But that *Divine delay does not mean inactivity*. God is not idle when He does not answer us; He is busier preparing the answer than we think. His delays are the delays of preparation. In an instant the tropical storm may burst and break, yet for weeks—unseen—the storm has been preparing. The sunshine of May comes, and all the world is green, yet on God's loom of January that robe was being spun. And the morning breaks when at last some prayer is answered, and the desert rejoices and blossoms as the rose, yet the answer was being fashioned in those very years when we said there was no eye to pity and no arm to save. It takes a century for the sea to wear away one cliff, yet every night when we sleep the breakers dash on it. So when we pray and strive and nothing happens, till we are tempted to say, 'God does not know, God does not care,' who can tell but that, behind the veil, infinite love may be toiling like the sea, to give us in the full time our heart's desire?

¶ God treats us as the storm wave treats the breakwater. The tempest does not wish to rend the stones asunder and make a ghastly breach; it does not desire to ruin the goodly ships which ride within; but it must do its work of proving—it must point out the ill-knit places where the thought of the engineer or the skill of the workmen have been at fault. Else how, in future, shall the ships ride safely in the harbour? God does not wish to sink the hopes and joys which ride like ships on the waters of the soul. But He does wish to make us strong, to teach us where we are weak, to save the hopes and joys which ride like ships in the haven of the heart. In finding out our own inability, we throw ourselves in all our failure upon the omnipotence of God's love. 'Thy grace, Thy power, Thy watchfulness—make them mine,' we cry. 'Come, and dwelling with me, make strong my soul.'[1]

Do not lose heart, then, at the delays of God. Speed, after all, is but a relative term, and there is more love in God's slow method than you think. Had you never some great news to tell your children which you deliberately withheld for a time? 'If we tell them to-night there will not be one wink of sleep; if we tell them when they waken, there will not be one bite of breakfast'; and so deliberately you held back the blessing, and you did it just because you loved them so. If ye, then, being evil, act like that, is it incredible that God should do the same?

Whom He loves the most
He seeks not oftenest, nor woos him long,
But by denial quickens his desire,
And in forgetting best remembers him,

[1] Stopford Brooke.

Till that man's heart grows humble and reaches out
To the least glimmer of the feet of God.[1]

Is it fair to distrust our Father, to say He has no pity, to charge the heavens with being brass above us? Is it not wiser to pray on, strive on, casting all doubts to the devil who inspired them; believing in a love that never mocks us, and that will give us our heart's desire in His own time?

IMPORTUNITY

Luke xviii. 5.—'Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.'

Our Lord taught His disciples many things, both by precept and example, concerning prayer. In particular He spoke two parables to illustrate and enforce the lesson of importunity, 'that men ought always to pray and not to faint.' These are the parables of the Friend at Midnight and the Unjust Judge, in both of which we have a picture of how a stubborn resolution to take no denial, a dogged persistence in asking, amounting even to shamelessness (*αναίδεια*), bears down all opposition, and at last attains its end. In neither case, however, it should be carefully noted, is the end a selfish one. No countenance is given to the gross idea that prayer is just a means of wheedling good things out of God for our own advantage. In the first parable the prayer is for blessing for others; in the second it is for the vindication of righteousness.

It is this latter which we are now to consider. Here, there can be little doubt that our Lord intends us to understand by the importunate widow the Christian Church, in its prolonged and weary wrestling with the powers of evil. 'Very fitly does a widow such as this represent the Church under persecution, under that persecution which never ceases, the oppression from an adverse element in which she draws her breath. Nor is it the Church at large which by the widow is represented here, but every single soul in conflict with those spiritual powers which are arrayed against the truth.'[2] And the main lesson of the parable is that the Church, setting out on a forlorn hope, may by her persistence pray through, and receive her heart's desire from the throne of grace.

[1] F. W. H. Myers.
[2] Trench, *Parables*, 495.

I

A FORLORN HOPE

The utter hopelessness of the widow's case is set in the strongest light. She is friendless, without influence and without defence. The desolation of widowhood in the East, lying open to every oppression and wrong, is feelingly depicted in the Old Testament, and the warnings are frequent that God Himself will be the widow's judge. But here is a judge 'who feared not God neither regarded man,' and to his judgment-seat the widow must bring her plea. There seems not the slightest hope that she will prevail.

Now it must strike every reader of the parable as a thing passing strange that our Lord should, even for a moment, compare the attitude of God to His people with that of an unjust judge spurning a widow's prayer. There is an amount of bold imagery in the parables, but this would seem to be overbold. To meet this difficulty it has been suggested that the injustice and regardlessness of the judge are emphasized in order to strengthen the argument *a fortiori*, if importunity can prevail over such a man how much more will it prevail with God. It has also been pointed out that the parables are wont to enforce a single impression by complete isolation, emphasizing a special excellence, for example, by embedding it in circumstances which are wholly evil. This encompassing evil, like the deep shadows in a Rembrandt picture, throws up into highest relief the one solitary point of light upon which the eye is to be fixed. Just as the dishonesty of the Unjust Steward by its very grossness throws up the shrewdness of his decision, so in this

parable the deepening of the shadows serves to throw up into the highest relief the unconquerable force of importunity.

While the truth of all that may be admitted there is another consideration which seems generally to have been overlooked. It is this, that to human eyes God the Judge of all does often seem, like the judge in the parable, to be both unjust and regardless, so that prayer to Him appears a hopeless and a futile thing.

(*a*) He seems *unjust* in the manner of His governing the world and portioning out their lot to men. This is an age-long complaint.

> 'Truth for ever on the scaffold, Wrong
> for ever on the throne.'

Try to imagine the outlook of a persecuted and martyred Church such as was in the days of the Apostles, or may be found in modern times under the heel of the Turk. Ringed round by iron walls of wrong, the victim of rapine and lust and blood, with no hope of redress because brutal tyranny sat in the throne of judgment, what wonder if men should begin to think that the fountains of eternal justice were poisoned at their very source? The wonder is that under such oppressions men have been able to maintain their faith at all, for the long-continued regency of evil on the earth casts a very dark shadow upon the heavens.

Multitudes to-day live under this shadow, and by reason of it are unable to believe in the righteousness of God. It is a commonplace that social injustice breeds irreligion. Many vehemently repudiate the Gospel because they can see no righteousness in the constitution of things. So great are the inequalities in men's lot, miseries so abound, wrongs are so slowly righted, and wickedness has had so long a lease of power that it is only maddening to be told there is a God of justice in the heavens. It is the justice of God that stands most in need of vindication.

(*b*) Or, if He be not *unjust*, at least He is regardless of the needs and feelings of His creatures. Think how 'the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now,' think of the untold ages of suffering, of animal pains and human sorrows, of the universal reign of death, and think how the ancient heavens have looked down upon it all and never once have moved nor given a sign. It seems a complete proof of the utter indifference of Nature.

> From scarped cliff and quarried stone
> She cries, 'A thousand types are gone:
> I care for nothing, all shall go.'[1]

God's world is a realm of unalterable law, heaven is deaf to the piteous cry for justice, and prayer is but futile beating on a shut door at midnight.

Now it is not the unbelieving but the faithful people of God, the very saints of the earth, who have felt this most acutely. Echoes of it resound in the psalms and the prophets, and through all Christian history. 'Hath God forgotten?' 'O that Thou wouldest rend the heavens and come down.' 'O God art Thou dead?' cries Martin Luther in his agony.

> I said, 'I will seek God,' and forth I went
> To seek Him in the clearness of the sky,
> But over me stood unendurably
> Only a pitiless, sapphire firmament.[2]

It is this pitiless firmament, this awful silence and seeming utter regardlessness of God which has been the supreme trial of the Church's faith, and has made mockery of her prayers. It is fitly set forth in the parable of the forlorn and helpless widow presenting her plea to a judge who 'feared not God neither regarded man.'

II

PRAYING THROUGH.

The widow feels herself 'up against it,' as the saying is, but her desperate need challenges her to a desperate effort. It may be a forlorn hope, but she will not accept defeat without a supreme struggle. It has been said by one well acquainted with the East that 'there are three ways of treating Asiatic officials—by bribe, by bullying, or by bothering them with a dogged perseverance into attending to you and your concerns.' The last is the only hope of the poor, and to it the widow had recourse. 'Chardin (*Travels in Persia*) tells us that the peasants of a district, when their crops have failed, and they therefore desire a remission of taxes, or when they would appeal against some tyrannical governor, will assemble before the gates of the Shah's palace, and there continue

[1] Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, lvi.
[2] Edward Dowden.

howling and throwing dust in the air, refusing to be silenced or driven away, till he has sent out and demanded the cause.'[1] It may not be a very dignified proceeding nor likely to be effective according to our western ideas, yet experience in the West as in the East goes to prove that indomitable persistence has a wonderful way of attaining its end.

In the companion parable of the Friend at Midnight we read of the householder, 'Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth,' and the word used might be translated shamelessness or impudence. The Greeks, using the same word, had a proverb, 'Impudence is a god,' and the Jews in like manner had a proverb, 'Impudence is an uncrowned king,' and another, 'Impudence succeeds even with God.'

That may seem strange doctrine, but let it be well considered that importunity is simply a manifestation in the religious realm of that unconquerable spirit which is man's chief glory, and by which all human achievement has been won. The whole upward struggle of the race has its root in this, that man has refused to accept defeat. Faced with hopeless tasks he has never known despair. He has attempted the impossible and won through by his persistence. He has set himself to subdue the earth, and with marvellous success. 'Man is but a reed,' says Pascal, 'weakest in nature,'[2] but, reed though he be and utterly weak amid the mighty forces of Nature, he persists till he makes himself master of them all. He finds the universe adaptable, and bends its unalterable laws to obey his sovereign will. He has harnessed the lightning, he has conquered the air, and those inconceivable quiverings of the ether which flow in upon him at the rate of forty thousand millions of millions per second, he has not only numbered but has captured them by a wire stretched on a pole and changed them into speech and music for his own delight. Such things seemed utterly impossible when man first set himself to his task, yet they have been achieved.

How has it all been done? By the persistence of intellectual effort, by the importunity of man's spirit knocking at Nature's doors and demanding to know her secrets. It has been done by the unwearying efforts of generations of men to think things through. And this indomitable spirit, if it fail not, gives promise of even grander achievements in the future, and of a glorious issue of the struggle, when man, crowned with glory and honour, shall have all things put under his feet.

Now, importunity in prayer is, in reality, the highest manifestation of this spirit. Man has his struggle in the spiritual world as well as in the natural. 'Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.'[1] This is indeed the critical centre and turning point of the whole battle. Material achievements, however wonderful, are in themselves inadequate. Evil wills must be subdued, man's spiritual world must be brought into harmony ere the triumph is complete.

Our weapons in this warfare are spiritual. Prayer, in one aspect of it, is the spirit energizing towards God and for the victory of the Kingdom of God. To be effective this spiritual effort must be persistent and sustained to the utmost. Our Lord often says in effect, 'Act towards the Kingdom of God as men are accustomed to act in reference to worldly affairs.' Such is His teaching in this parable. Do men, when they encounter a difficulty, sit down under it? Do they give up after a single trial? Do they not resolutely persist till they succeed? So must it be, then, in our spiritual strivings. Too often in our prayers we are like timid boys who ring the bell and run away, not like the man who kept knocking on the door at midnight till it had to be opened to him. But those who are in dead earnest about the Kingdom of God are importunate in their prayers. Read in every Epistle of St Paul how importunate he was in prayer. 'Without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers.' 'My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.' Or hearken to John Knox as he cries out, 'O God, give me Scotland, or I die.'

This is the spirit that wins. 'Prayer,' says Fosdick, 'is dominant desire, the settled craving of a man's heart,'[2] and there is abundant evidence that such dominant desire has a strange power of working out its own fulfilment. For one thing it sets a man on to devising ways and

[1] Trench, *Parables*, 498.
[2] *Pensées*.

[1] Eph. vi. 12 (R.V.).
[2] *The Meaning of Prayer*, 144.

means. 'For twenty-four years,' said Peary, 'sleeping or awake, to place the stars and stripes on the Pole had been my dream,' and it gave him no rest till he had planned and accomplished it. Frederick Douglass said that in the days of his slavery he used often to pray for freedom, but that his prayer was not answered until it got down into his own heels and he ran away. So it will be found to be. The man who prays importunately is the man who will plan and scheme and work for the fulfilment of his heart's desire.

Moreover, such dominant desire gives unity and strength to a man's character, knitting together all his energies and imparting a tremendous momentum to his will. This is typified in the experience of Jacob at Peniel, who after his long night of wrestling arose a prince with God. It is seen in the devotion of Paul, saying, 'One thing I do,' in the passionate utterance of Zinzendorf, 'I have but one passion, He, He only,' in the indomitable spirit of David Livingstone, of General Booth, and of all, like them,

The soldier-saints who, row on row,
Burn upward each to his point of bliss—
Since, the end of life being manifest,
He had burned his way through the world to this.[1]

And, still further, it influences others, drawing them into the stream of its purpose as by the suction of a powerful current. Given a strong lead men will follow, and the strong lead is given by the man whose heart is fixed and who is invincibly resolved to win through.

The Roman Senate, after a disastrous defeat, thanked their general because he had not despaired of the Republic. It is indeed a public service to stand firm when others falter, to hope on when others are ready to despair. Such constancy is like a great rock behind which the weary and dispirited may take shelter and rally their courage for a fresh endeavour.

So then, it would appear that importunity in prayer is the noblest exercise of which the soul is capable. It is the concentration of the whole spiritual energies of a man upon the highest ends, and no matter what difficulties and discouragements may be encountered, to persist unwearied is both right and heroic. Even though the case were as desperate as the widow's, even though the powers above might seem unjust and regardless of his prayer, yet would man still be required to strive and wrestle in spirit, if perchance he might at last wring some blessing out of the stony heart of things.

[1] Browning, *The Statue and the Bust.*

III

THE THRONE OF GRACE

But our Lord does not leave it at that. Prayer, He assures us, is offered at a throne of grace, not at any seat of injustice. God is not what He seems. All the time, in spite of the dark and discouraging aspect of things, we are dealing with a loving heavenly Father, who is longsuffering, sympathetic, and entirely willing to give. 'As to any notion of prevailing over an unwilling God, that is heathenish, and belongs to such as think Him a hard master, or one like the unjust judge. What so quenching to prayer as the notion of unwillingness in the ear that hears! And when prayer is dull, what makes it flow like the thought that God is waiting to give, wants to give us everything!'[1]

Prayer, says Trench, is not to be conceived as 'an overcoming of God's reluctance, but as a laying hold of his highest willingness.'[2]

Fervent love,
And lively hope, with violence assail
The kingdom of the heavens, and overcome
The will of the Most High; not in such sort
As man prevails o'er man; but conquers it,
Because 'tis willing to be conquered, still,
Though conquered, by its mercy, conquering.[3]

In all this there is every encouragement to pray, while at the same time it suggests that all hindrance is on our side. The question is sometimes asked, if God is so good and loving, and if He knows all that we need, and better far than we do ourselves, why should it be necessary to ask Him for anything? Why cannot He grant all needed blessing forthwith? The answer is that God can only give as we are able to receive. It is in order that He may be able to give that God requires us to ask. For

[1] George Macdonald, *Unspoken Sermons*, ii, 76.
[2] *Parables*, 331.
[3] *Paradiso*, 20.

how can He give into the soul of a man what it needs, while that soul cannot receive it? The ripeness for receiving is the asking. The blossom-cup of the soul, to be filled with the heavenly dews, is its prayer. When the soul is hungry, when its hunger has awakened its higher energies, and when all these are poured out in prayer, then God can give, because the soul is ready to receive.

Or if the prayer be for blessing upon others, and the general advancement of the Kingdom of God, then the hindrance may lie in the fact that we are not ready to co-operate with God. George Macdonald comments with delight on Michael Angelo's picture of the creation of man in the Sixtine Chapel of the Vatican 'with the young ones and the little ones come to help God to make Adam.'[1] It is no mere fancy of the painter's, for in the realm of human wills nothing can be done by sheer omnipotence. Even God can work only by free consent. It is written of the unbelieving and faint-hearted generation in the wilderness that 'they limited the Holy One of Israel.'[2] He could not, because they would not. And thus do we all, by our unbelief and dullness of heart, block the streams of God's blessing, instead of making wide the channels for their flow.

Therefore our Saviour's only fear is lest faith should fail. 'When the Son of man cometh shall He find faith on the earth?' There will be no failure on God's side, 'for His mercy endureth for ever,' but will man's faith hold out to the end? So it all comes back upon ourselves, and we must be resolute by the grace of God to keep on praying. Prayer is a matter of faith in the last resort. Whatever answers may come for our confirmation and encouragement, prayer will never cease to be an act of faith. Therefore we must hold to it. 'Men ought always to pray and not to faint,' believing, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, that the answer in the end is sure.

'I will say what I know by experience,' writes Santa Teresa, an expert in the art of prayer, 'let him never cease from prayer who has once begun to pray, be his life never so bad. For prayer is the only way to mend his life, and without prayer it will never be mended. If that soul perseveres in spite of sin and temptation and many relapses, our Lord will bring that soul at last—I am certain of it—to the harbour of salvation.'[1] Nay more, not only will the soul that perseveres in prayer reach the harbour of salvation, but by such persevering and importunate prayer the Kingdom of God will come.

J. H. Morrison.

[1] *Unspoken Sermons*, ii, 90.
[2] Ps. lxxviii. 41.

This Faith

Luke xviii. 7, 8.—'Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?'

1. What are we to understand by the term 'faith' here—or 'the faith,' we may say, since it has the article? On the face of it, it is clear that it is not the Christian religion that is meant by it; nor yet belief in Jesus as the Christ; nor yet the assurance that He will come again. Any one of these things the term might mean in a different context. But not here. Here it naturally means that faith which sustains, and manifests itself in persistent prayer. This parable was spoken to inculcate the necessity of persistent prayer with unabating confidence. And, in His words of application, our Lord reasserts, with the greatest emphasis, the sure basis of this confidence in the character and purposes of God. It is naturally of this confidence that He continues to speak when, in His closing question, He demands whether 'the faith'—the faith in question, the faith which He had been illustrating—shall still be found on the earth at His coming.

The question is, of course, a rhetorical one. Our Lord is not inquiring for information. But it is not, therefore, to be taken as a counterfeit one. Our Lord is not, in the form of a question, giving information. He neither expects to learn from His disciples, nor does He expect to teach them, by His question, whether such faith as He had been commending to them shall remain on the earth when He comes again. His object is to rouse to effort. What He is aiming at is ethical impression. He wishes to encourage His disciples to preserve that attitude of confident trust in God which it is the purpose of the parable to inculcate.

[1] A. Whyte, *Santa Teresa*, 69.

¶ Lord Rosebery, in his *Life of Pitt*, records a conversation which took place as to the quality required in a Prime Minister. While one said eloquence, another knowledge, another toil, Pitt said patience. Shakespeare shows far less than his usual insight when he pictures 'Patience sitting on a monument, smiling at grief.' It would have been truer if he had presented it as strong, active, courageous, resolute in fellowship to bear the ills and checks of life with a settled purpose of faithfulness to duty. Ruskin is more in correspondence with fact when he declares that 'the Patience who really smiles at grief usually stands, or walks, or even runs: she seldom sits.' But even this is inadequate. Let us call patience 'the King of Virtues,' or adopt Tertullian's description and regard it as 'God's foster-daughter.' Patience is hopefulness made constant by the confidence of faith.[1]

Christ, so to speak, in this final question 'puts it to' the disciples, whether 'the faith' of which He speaks shall be a permanent fact in the world. God's ears are ever open to the cries of His people: He is faithful. Are they, on their part, equally to be depended upon? If God is not like the unjust judge, are they like the importunate widow? Or will they, as she did not, fail? Will they be able to say:

> When the anchors that faith has cast
> Are dragging in the gale,
> I am quietly holding fast
> To the things that cannot fail.

2. Jesus was not asking from men a quality of which He knew nothing. In His own experience He had to learn patience of this heroic kind. There were occasions when it seemed as though God had left Him to Himself; He was tried by the sight of fine work thwarted, of 'captive good and captain ill,' of spiritual enterprises apparently at the mercy of accident and circumstance. Yet through it all He never lost His faith in the Father's strong and wise ordering of life. Jesus 'believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.' He had faith on earth, and He expected the same sturdy trust from His followers instead of the thinly veiled suspicion and the languid distrust which characterized so many of them when the sky grew clouded. 'I tell you' is His word. What He gives is His personal experience and assurance of God's loyalty to our interests.

Nevertheless there is another side to this. Will Christians prove loyal to their God? 'When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?' The source and secret of faith is our conception of God's character. Whether we are conscious of it or not, our ideas of God are what determine our loyalty to Him. Now Jesus brought the revelation of a Father whose love and power were pledged to vindicate human confidence and to right the wrong. I tell you, said Jesus, He will come to the aid of His chosen. This conviction, so essential to a stable faith, is what Jesus seeks to inspire in the human heart; for whenever people, under the influence of any current tendency, allow themselves to think of God as capricious or impersonal, the heart sooner or later grows unsettled and disturbed.

The trial of patience may come to us in different ways.

(1) It often comes to those who are interested in some good cause, but who feel that circumstances are too stiff to yield to the reform. They may despond when they realize that they cannot carry the thing through with a rush, when unexpected difficulties arrive, and when the business of helping others turns out to be much more complex and exacting than they had anticipated. Take almost any cause or movement, and you will find that a period usually arrives when it seems to be making little or no headway. Such a period is the real test of its adherents. It is then that all who have joined simply for the sake of novelty or popularity slip out of the fighting ranks because their impatience is too strong for their faith, while even in some of those who are left there is a sensible decline of conviction and of perseverance.

The enterprise of the Christian religion is often an illustration of this. It is the essence of a vital faith to believe that God is on our side, not an impartial judge or an indifferent spectator, but with us in our highest efforts to change the world's face and serve our day. And one reason for slackness is simply the cooling of this conviction. When a big wave of impulse and achievement sweeps over the Church, men and women start up half surprised to find that God after all is living, and that the hope they once fondly cherished is still prac-

[1] *Life's True Values*, 96.

ticable—perhaps even on the point of being realized. It is people of that languid type who have coined and popularized the pagan saying, 'it's too good to be true,' as if anything were too good to be true in a world over which God is Lord. Those who believe in God's responsibility for His work as well as in their own should never be upset because they cannot go faster than He does, or taken aback when any fresh token of His living presence is vouchsafed after a long delay. It is their duty, as followers of Jesus, to work and wait with the moral passion of the spiritual hope unabated.

(2) The other sphere in which this trial of faith meets us is our personal experience. Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but it also is apt to make the mind misjudge God and the world. There are people who can be relied upon to do almost anything except wait.

¶ Sir Henry Jones wrote to one of his pupils who had been appointed principal of a college: 'Have patience: have immense patience. No seed takes longer to grow than that sown in the soil of human nature; the best things far more than a lifetime. Had I at your age got my way and been given the Principalship at Bangor, I would have broken the knees of my team with over-driving, and my own neck. The grass would long ago have been growing over my forgotten grave.'[1]

¶ We need such patience sorely in the spirit, and the faith in God by which it lives. For the great ideas, principles, and hopes of our life with God grow slowly, against severe opposition, into fullness and certainty—as slowly as a pine, rock-rooted, and baffled and beaten by storms. We are impatient with temptations, with trials, with our own yielding nature, with the circumstances of the time which disturb our faith, with the weight of duties which confuse our life—impatient with God Himself, because He does not give us certainty at once. And in this impatience we are ready to throw aside all effort to establish communion with God, to pray to His Fatherhood, to strive for likeness to Christ Jesus. Oh, a soul which is to live, and be fit to live for eternal ages, is not quickly built.[2]

I tell you, says Jesus, firmly, you are God's chosen ones, and God will do His part by you. Your suspicions of Him are absolutely unfounded. 'Nevertheless'—and when He turns from God to look at us, He is not so sure—'nevertheless . . . shall the Son of man find faith on the earth?'

3. Was not His question justified? We cannot answer it for our age; we have no right to do that. But we can answer it for ourselves. Have we not been often ashamed of ourselves—ashamed to remember how we lost faith during the storm and charged God foolishly?

[1] *The Life and Letters of Sir Henry Jones*, 35.
[2] O. Jacks, *Die to Live*, 33.

Depreciation

Luke xviii. 9.—'And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.'

1. Few things more retard spiritual growth, or more effectually blight the joy of life, than the habit of criticism and depreciation. Mozley teaches, in his *University Sermons*: 'A life of enmities is greatly in opposition to growth in holiness'; but what falls short of enmities, even the habit of discovering and emphasizing what we may regard as the seamy side of men, things, and events is intensely unwholesome and injurious.

¶ Where Napoleon could not inspire devotion he struck fear. He had the poor opinion of human nature which prevails among politicians; and we must remember that at the close of a violent revolution men show their worst side. The bullies and intriguers are apt to come out at the top, vaulting over their more virtuous and consistent comrades. Napoleon had lived through that time, which, as we saw, sapped the idealism of his youth and imbued him with hard and cynical notions. Thenceforth he sought to find out the weak and bad points of men, and in general he exaggerated them. As a Councillor of State observed, 'Napoleon, looking down from the vast height which he had reached, thought the rest of mankind smaller than they really were; and this was the cause of his downfall.' There is a deep truth in this. A man who despises the human race will end by alienating it.[1]

¶ Human nature is lovable, and the way I have learnt something of its deep pathos, its sublime mysteries, has been by living a great deal among people more or less commonplace

[1] J. H. Rose, *The Personality of Napoleon*, 162.

and vulgar, of whom you would perhaps hear nothing very surprising if you were to inquire about them in the neighbourhood where they dwelt. Ten to one most of the small shopkeepers in their vicinity saw nothing at all in them. For I have observed this remarkable coincidence, that the select natures who pant after the ideal, and find nothing in pantaloons or petticoats great enough to command their reverence and love, are curiously in unison with the narrowest and pettiest. For example, I have often heard Mr Gedge, the landlord of the Royal Oak, who used to turn a bloodshot eye on his neighbours in the village of Shepperton, sum up his opinion of the people in his own parish—and they were all the people he knew—in these emphatic words: 'Ay, sir, I've said it often, and I'll say it again, they're a poor lot i' this parish—a poor lot, sir, big and little.' I think he had a dim idea that if he could migrate to a distant parish, he might find neighbours worthy of him; and indeed he did subsequently transfer himself to the Saracen's Head, which was doing a thriving business in the back street of a neighbouring market-town. But, oddly enough, he has found the people up that back street of precisely the same stamp as the inhabitants of Shepperton—'a poor lot, big and little, and them as comes for a go o' gin are no better than them as comes for a pint o' twopenny—a poor lot.' [1]

2. The habit of running things down is no sign of mental superiority, although many imagine it to be so; far oftener it is an indication of mental impotence and obliquity. 'The monkey,' according to Mr Lockwood Kipling, 'has a passion for picking things to pieces'; and that passion is the characteristic of inferior men. 'Intelligent men are easily pleased,' testifies the Turkish proverb; and it is true. Without question the highest intellects are specially appreciative. We do not prove the quality of our genius by cavil and detraction, by an unwillingness to be pleased and a readiness to censure, but by doing some worthy thing handsomely. As Drummond puts it: 'It is easier to criticize the best thing superbly than to do the smallest thing indifferently.' To blow upon persons, to carp at their endeavours, and to handle things generally in a fastidious and disparaging spirit, is the sure sign of a mean and narrow intellect.[1]

3. Nor is the habit of depreciation a sign of a narrow intellect only; it is also the sign of a low moral tone. A soul—and especially a young soul—that has no 'hero-worship' in it, of some sort or other, thereby writes itself down as ignoble. The cynic who is constantly depreciating the actions and suspecting the motives of others is certainly paying no compliment to himself. A man does some deed that has a noble and worthy look about it. You know nothing whatever of the man; but you must, forsooth, begin with bitterness to insinuate that his action may not be so disinterested as it looks—that it springs, probably, from some selfish or sinister motive! What does all this mean but that you find it hard to believe in nobleness?

¶ It is of all things the most melancholy to watch the moral clouding-over of life's early dawn; to trace the dim veil stealing over the artless look; to notice how the earnest tone begins to leave the voice, and every worthy enthusiasm dies away into indifference; how it comes to be thought a fine thing to speak coolly of what is odious for its vice, and critically of what is awful for its beauty.' [2]

'And Jesus spake also this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and set all others at nought.' That was the sting of their condemnation—they 'despised others,' they 'set all others at nought.' It was chiefly this habit of depreciation that branded them as being superficial and false. To suspect men, to impute to them poor motives, to construe their actions uncharitably, and to be niggardly of encouragement and praise, is to discover and perpetuate the hollowness of our own character.

4. Let us seek to look at all men as through the eyes of Christ. This is the grand antidote to the spirit of depreciation. The grand secret of loving and caring for and bearing with others lies in looking at them through the eyes of Him who is their Redeemer and ours. When He 'ate and drank with publicans and sinners,' He saw the possibilities of goodness and of blessedness that lay beneath all the vice and misery.

[1] George Eliot.

[1] W. L. Watkinson, *Frugality in the Spiritual Life*, 167.
[2] James Martineau.

He had His word of stern severity for the respectable, self-righteous Pharisee; but we never find Christ railing bitterly or scornfully against mankind. For the fallen He had a heart to pity and a hand to help. His love detected the elements of goodness that lay smouldering in the ashes. They tell us that 'Love is blind'; but be sure that hatred, or even indifference, is far blinder. Love may sometimes be blind to faults, but it has a quick eye for excellences. It has a quick eye, too, for the possibilities of character, for the ideal that lies within the actual, for the perfect statue that may yet be chiselled out of the marble. We cannot see *the best* that is in any man or woman until we look through the eyes of love. And therefore, if at any time we begin to feel the chill of the cynical mood creeping over us, let us place ourselves anew by the side of Christ, and try to feel a little of what He feels as He looks down on our weak, struggling, tempted, sorrowing humanity.[1]

The Pharisee and the Publican

Luke xviii. 10.—'Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.'

Two went to pray! O, rather say
One went to brag, th' other to pray:
One stands up close and treads on high,
Where th' other dares not send his eye;
One nearer to God's altar trod,
The other to the altar's God.[2]

1. 'The one a Pharisee.' There is no need to think of the Pharisee as a man of evil and vicious repute. We have sometimes allowed our imaginations to riot in excessive license in conceiving this particular suppliant, until we have relegated him to a chamber of moral horrors, where he stands as the terrible example of human shallowness and infamy. No such exaggerations are justified. The fact of the matter is, if he be rightly classed, he might in many respects be ranked as distinctly superior to the average man. For when we look calmly at the narrative, with eyes relieved from the perverting heat of prejudice, what do we find? We find a man who is not an extortioner: that is to say, he has respect for other people's property. He is not unjust: that is to say, he has respect for other people's rights. He is not an adulterer: that is to say, he respects the sanctities of his own body. He fasts twice in the week: that is to say, his appetite is in the leash, and he governs it with firm and manly self-control. He gives tithes of all that he gets: that is to say, his charities are organized in systematic beneficence. Now, put all these characteristics together, and we may venture to say that in moral attainments he stands superior to the average man. The resultant product is not a Judas, not a Shylock, and we grossly abuse the narrative when we pull and wrench and squeeze it into so vicious a caricature. And yet it is imperative to add that, though these separate lineaments are admirable, they do not constitute an attractive force. They are winsome characteristics, but they do not constitute a winsome character. You can spoil a most admirable combination by leaving out the salt. And this man's character is spoiled, not by what is present, but by what is missing. And what is it that is wanting? The sense of want! Our Lord does not condemn his possessions, but his satisfactions. Here is the fatal flaw, the deadly rot among the fruit: there is no maturity to come: life has reached its culmination; he wants nothing, he has no sense of need, and aspiration is dead.

¶ In the poem entitled *Indwelling*, T. E. Brown pictures the soul as a shell and reproaches it because, being not yet dead to self, it cannot receive the ocean:

But thou art all replete with very *thou*,
And hast such shrewd activity,
That, when He comes, He says,—'This is enow
Unto itself—'Twere better let it be:
It is so small and full, there is no room for Me.'

2. 'The other a publican.' Side by side with the satisfied Pharisee stands the dissatisfied publican. There is every probability that this man's life has been deeply dyed with injustice and extortion. It is most likely that in such a calling, and with such surroundings, there had arisen no springs of gracious beneficence. In moral attainments he cannot be compared with the Pharisee. And here he stands, 'afar off,' not so much as lifting his shame-filled eyes to the heavens; and amid all the conspicuous

[1] T. C. Finlayson, *Essays, Addresses, and Lyrical Translations*, 201.
[2] R. Crashaw.

nudity of his soul there is something more conspicuous still, even his sense of moral nudity, his consciousness of spiritual want, for he 'smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner!'

3. Now, the Master sets those two men in contrast, and His judgment goes against the man who has made some progress in moral attainments, and favours the man who has no victories to show, but only a hunger for victory. The dissatisfied sinner is preferred to the self-satisfied saint. There is more hope in penitent bankruptcy than in self-complacent affluence. The Pharisee had gained an inch, but had lost his sense of the continent. The publican had not pegged out an inch of moral claim, but he had an overwhelming feeling for the untrodden universe. And in these mystic realms the continent shall be given to him who has the hungry consciousness of its inviting vastness, even though as yet he has not planted his flag on the outermost fringe of its broad dominion. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

And so this was the verdict of the Lord!—'This man'—the man with the sense of want—'went down to his house justified, rather than the other'—the man with only the sense of possession. The shame-filled publican was 'justified,' the pride-filled Pharisee was condemned. One was 'justified,' the other was non-justified.

Give the word its deepest and wealthiest meaning. To justify the publican was not to whitewash his uncleanness. No, no; it was infinitely more than that. The only effective justification for any man is to be put right with God, to have a perverted relationship rectified, to come into tune with the Infinite. That is the significance of justification. We need not imagine that if we had followed the justified publican down to his house we should have found that every vestige of his old self had gone, and that his river of life had become clear as crystal. A man may be fundamentally right with God, and yet not have attained to perfect righteousness. When there has been some rupture in the water-main, even when the workmen have adjusted and rectified the broken relationship, the water does not immediately become clear and clean. The rupture is ended, but the stream is not yet pellucid. And men can be justified with God, and yet there may be risings of old desire, the risings of former unclean habit, and the waters may not yet be like the 'sea of glass.' Barnabas may be fundamentally right with God, and yet, and yet, 'even Barnabas may be carried away with dissimulation!'

Let us hold on to that, or we shall surely become the hopeless victims of paralysing fears. We can become justified in a moment, we can become sanctified only through the discipline and exercise of a life. And here is the teaching of our parable—that we are justified by the penitent sense of want, and not by the boastful sense of possession. To the penitent sense of want the infinite is opened; to the self-satisfied sense of fullness the infinite is closed. 'This man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.'

(1) Here, then, is the first teaching. The Divine continuance of Divine fellowship is dependent on human aspiration. Our sense of want is our measure of hope, and our measure of hope determines the poverty or fullness of our communion. The Pharisee's vision was all retrospective: he had no prospect: he had no 'beyond,' no realm of admirations, no hopes. He became satisfied with the inch, and he lost the infinite. To be satisfied with oneself, in any line, is a bad sign. But Jesus regarded that complacency which is apt to come so easily to religious people as a very serious thing. 'Faults,' cries Carlyle, 'the greatest of faults, I should say, is to be conscious of none!'

¶ Mark Guy Pearse tells somewhere that he once visited the Guild of Poor Brave Things, and found a cheerful meeting going on of little invalids whose crutches, piled against the wall, told their own tale. Outside, however, he met a little girl weeping bitterly, and when he asked what was the matter, she replied, 'Oh, I can't get in, cos I ain't got nothing the matter with me.'

It is a solemn fact that there is one bar that does hinder a man from getting into the place where the Lord waits to be gracious. There is one bar, and only one. The man who has 'nothing the matter with him' cannot enter.[1]

(2) And then, too, we are surely warranted in making this further inference from our Master's

[1] A. Alexander, *The Stuff of Life*, 195.

teaching—that the winsomeness of every virtue depends upon the unconsciousness of its possession. No virtue will bear ostentatious exhibition. When a man rings a bell, or blows a trumpet, and then addresses his audience on his virtues, calling them to note that he is not an extortioner, or unjust, and that he fasts twice a week, and gives tithes of all he gets—well, his graces become surely wizened in the exposition. Of all unattractive things exhibited piety is the most repellent. To flaunt our prayerfulness, our fasting, or to wear things which draw attention to them, is utterly to despoil them of their grace and beauty. It is like taking exquisite seaweed out of the salt water; what was delicately winsome in its natural element becomes a sticky and offensive mass when obtruded in the dry and most unnatural air. A virtue is winsome only when it is unostentatious: a grace is graceful only when it is unconsciously worn.

'I thank thee, that I am not as other men!' 'Or even as this publican!' If you want the infinite contrast between self-satisfied pietism and a truly sanctified life you have it in these two sentences, which, for the purposes of the contrast, we may place side by side: 'Or even as this publican.' 'This man eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners.'

Self-exception

Luke xviii. 11.—'I am not as other men are.'

1. It is not only in the spirit of religious pride, in the self-separating tendencies of a fancied superiority, that we see the exclusiveness of human nature. There is in us all a disposition to regard our own as in every possible way an excepted case; to look upon ourselves as exempted from the operation of ordinary laws, removed from the reach of necessities inevitable for all else, constituting a single and isolated instance to which alone no inference drawn from the most uniform experience can certainly apply. 'I am not as other men are.'

¶ Thomas Boston knew the danger of this. There is a quaint passage in his diary in which we see him preaching to himself the sermons that he had preached to others. 'I observed that Satan has overcome me, even in those things that I preached against. (1) Preaching at Dunse, I preached against immoderate sleep as a great waster of time; and quickly after I fell into this. (2) Last Thursday I preached that unwatchfulness was the cause why it is not with God's people as in times past; and the very same night my heart fell a-roving. (3) At this Evening Exercise I lectured on Hebrews xiii., and particularly that word, 'Be content with such things as ye have'; and immediately after this, dissatisfaction seized me, for which my heart abhors my heart: wherefore, being convinced of my danger, I resolved in the Lord's strength, from henceforth to make my sermons the subject of my Sabbath-night's meditation, and so to improve them for myself.'

(1) *We see it in the things of this life.*—Which of us has not heard, and professed to believe, that no amount of talent, without diligence, can produce real distinction or abiding success in our earthly calling? Again and again we have seen the sad and disappointing spectacle of wasted abilities, hope blighted by negligence, the transient brilliancy of childhood followed (for want of exertion and perseverance) by a youth and a manhood of obscurity and failure. Yet how many in their own case disregard this fact! How many are satisfied with that fallacious quickness of expression rather than thought, which requires, to make it worth anything, a large amount of self-discipline, self-coercion, and earnest toil! And they imagine that that failure which they have seen a thousand times in others is by some unwarranted and unaccountable favour not to befall them.

(2) *We see it in our estimate of life.*—We all repeat the words, 'Man is born to trouble'; and in the misfortunes of our neighbours we would console them with the reflection that this life cannot be for any a time of unmixed happiness, that they are but paying the penalty of our common nature, and should remember that the same afflictions are accomplished in their brethren also that are in the world. But how little prepared are we for the application of the same rule to ourselves! How surprised we are, disappointed, provoked, by the occurrence to ourselves of one of these universal calamities!

¶ The friends of Job have an unsavory reputation, but they are not perhaps so black as they are usually painted. Eliphaz, the oldest of the three friends, has in him a touch of the seer, if not of the prophet. There is a sanctified commonsense in what he says to Job: 'Thy

words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees. But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled.' We have our consolations to offer to others. We point out that every cloud has a silver lining. We quote texts about all things working together for good. But supposing the sorrow came instead to *yourself*—in the words of Eliphaz, if it came upon *thee*, if it touched *thee*—would the consolations flow as easily round your own heart as they flowed from your lips round the hearts of others.' [1]

Pain, sickness, loss of friends; things far less than these—the denial of a day's pleasure, the imposition of an hour's restraint, even if the one be manifestly for our good, and the latter occasioned by our misdeeds—how often we regard even these things as an injustice done or a right withheld, and fret secretly against that hand which holds us, and which will not let us go even if we desire it.

(3) *We see it in our attitude to death.*—For strangers we anticipate its approach with an almost precipitate certainty. We marvel if one who has evidently but a few months to live, spends those few months in the pursuit of pleasures which must soon be to him as a dream when one awaketh. But who so judges in his own case? Which of us lives in the expectation of death, in the preparation for death? And, if this is less surprising in the case of those who are in possession of unbroken health and spirits, is it not equally true of those later periods of life which begin to approximate to the limit of mortal existence, that still no one expects himself to die. Every one goes on in his daily round of occupation and of amusement, never seriously reflecting, taken as thoroughly by surprise when the last sickness or the sudden death-stroke befalls him, as he would have been in the days of youth and strength.

2. Now, if we see the evidence of this spirit of self-exception in the affairs of our common life, what shall we say when we approach the region of spiritual things and think of revelations which require the faith of the heart as well as the acquiescence of the understanding? Let us consider some of these revelations.

(1) *The revelation of sin.*—It is the first object of all revelation to convince the soul of sin. Now, we all hold the same language, and admit, without fear of contradiction, that we are nothing, that Christ is all. But, while we admit this of men generally, of our neighbours, of our friends, is it indeed our estimate of ourselves? Do we believe that in us—in me personally—dwelleth no good thing? that no quality of ours, no natural disposition, no natural talent, is a thing to be proud of, or trusted in? Which of us—even of those of us who kneel before God twice a day in the prostration of the lowliest self-abasement—which of us does not feel himself aggrieved if another should presume to echo in his ears the language of his own confession; if another should deal with him, as he speaks of himself as sinful, infirm, ignorant, or imperfect? more especially, if another should dare to see in him a fault or weakness which from himself he can scarcely disguise? See whether his spirit on such an occasion corresponds and harmonizes with the words of his creed.

¶ 'Where have you been?' said one man to another, as Mrs Laura Richards tells the story. 'I have been at the altar, confessing my sins.' 'Speaking of sins,' said his friend, 'there is a fault I have often noticed in you,' and he told him the fault. 'Liar,' said the man, and smote him on the mouth. That is the weakness of much of our talk about sin: we should be mortally offended if anyone took us to mean just what we said.[1]

(2) *The revelation of judgment.*—We all pity or condemn the man who has evidently lived without God, breaking His laws and defying His threatenings. We augur ill for his future happiness, and we connect that apprehension with certain definite acts of sin. But how is it when the question is shifted from others to ourselves? Do we, as a matter of sober and practical truth, expect the judgment? expect it as a judgment by works? expect it as that which can be neither eluded nor bribed—a judgment without respect of persons, and in which the Judge is He who trieth the hearts? Does our daily life warrant the belief that we set before our minds as a real and palpable truth the revelation of the judgment; or rather, that, while we expect it for others, we do not expect it for ourselves—that we practically except ourselves from its operation, and say, 'I am not as other men are'?

[1] J. M. E. Ross, *The Christian Standpoint*, 15 f.

[1] A. Alexander, *The Stuff of Life*, 193.

(3) *The revelation of the effects and consequences of sin.*—It is certainly the case that we, to a great extent, except ourselves with regard to the effects and consequences of sin; not in the decision of our future destiny, but rather, in this life, and with reference to that spiritual process of improvement or of deterioration which is so often described in Divine language as one of sowing and reaping, a seedtime and a harvest. It is unquestionably the declaration of Scripture that every instance of sin, whether mental or actual, produces a definite effect upon the moral condition of man; that it makes evil henceforth easier, good more difficult; that it blunts the edge of conscience, and diminishes in the same degree the probability of salvation. Now for others it is easy thus to speak and to judge. Doubtless we all admit the truth in theory. But do we act upon it in our own case? Are we not extremely careless in its application to ourselves?

Two Kinds of Separation

Luke xviii. 13.—'And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.'

1. *Separation by saintliness.*—The publican is in the temple along with the man who counted him accursed. They are linked to each other by the affinity of contrast. The Pharisee finds it convenient to refer to his fellow-worshipper—'or even this publican'; and the latter introduces into his heart-broken prayer the name that the saint had given him—'me the sinner.' The Pharisee is quite at his ease in the house that belonged to him and God. He reads off the menu of moralities on which his spiritual man fared sumptuously every day. He puts a theological heading to the list of his attainments—'God, I thank thee.' Such pre-eminence must be the result of a Divine purpose. He is called and consecrated to spiritual pride, select and selfish by the will of God. He is the type of holiness without humanity, of sainthood without sympathy. There is here a first stage of hypocrisy, and then comes self-delusion. The last act of the stomach is to digest itself. The God of truth is not mocked.

¶ Julian the apostate in his dying oration addressed his companions thus: 'I die without remorse, as I have lived without guilt. I am pleased to reflect on the innocence of my private life; and I can affirm, with confidence, that the supreme authority, that emanation of the Divine Power, has been preserved in my hands pure and immaculate.' [1]

This is spiritual death—something that has lived and died. Such is separation from God by saintliness. How different where salvation leads to sympathy and service! This is the secret of the double growth at once in humility and in holiness—

> Two wonders I confess:—
> The wonder of His glorious love,
> And my own worthlessness.

2. *Separation by sin.*—(1) The publican *before God.* Like the Pharisee in the Divine presence, he also tells everything—'me the sinner.' It was what the leaders of religion said about his class. The Teacher would know well the meaning of the word, for He was in the same condemnation; it was part of the cross He bore, 'despising the shame,' to be spurned by those who were zealous for righteousness. And so the publican, in turning from the guardians of the law to its Giver, by some strange compulsion of faith comes before God with the name that men gave him. He calls himself 'the sinner.'

(2) The publican *in the Roman Empire.* To appreciate the faith that brought him to the footstool of God's mercy, we must understand why the Pharisees counted him an outcast and an abomination. He was in the service of the Roman Empire in Palestine: belonging to the public company for collecting taxes on produce, transit, population, etc. He stood at every city gate, and had one word of greeting to all—Pay. Rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, the long caravan with costly freight, the busy farmer with his mule-load carefully strapped and balanced, the poor village-woman with her basket of eggs and pots of curded milk—all had to stop, meet his claims, and, worst of all, await his convenience. With the Empire in their pay, and the Roman police at their back, the publicans soon became a powerful class, condemned, yet courted; hated, yet upheld. A Jewish tax-gatherer could neither be overcome

[1] E. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ii., 515.

by force nor deceived by guile; he could only be hated.

(3) The publican *before the Pharisees*. He silenced the Pharisees as the streams of Babel did the harps of Israel, reminding them of the stranger's yoke, and the Divine rejection. He was condemned religiously. He was practically a heathen, for he allowed free passage on the festival-days of the gods. He was no Jew, no son of Abraham, for his interests were with his office, and his knowledge of his people was used against them. His word was not to be accepted in a court of justice, and it was no sin to deceive him when it was possible.

(4) The publican *to himself*. The ancient prophet had needed a face of brass; the publican needed a heart of brass. It is a distressing thing to lose faith in human nature; to experience the wholesale revulsion that cries, All men are liars, all godliness is for gain, all truth is talk, and all ideals exaggeration! This was the publican's danger. He lived in an atmosphere of greed, cunning, and deceit. He saw the worst aspect of life, and he might have quieted his conscience by saying, This is the reality, and I am not worse than this! Others saw the breadth of the Pharisee's phylactery, but he knew its depth. And these were the men of the law who excommunicated him! Was it a forfeiture? Who cared? But the publican in the parable did not abandon God or God's law. He saw that there must be something real in religion to put a value on hypocrisy. Imitation is an evidence of the actual. And so, in spite of all in his daily life that kept him back, he came to the throne of grace, feeling that he must, and believing that there was blessing even for him.

With downcast eyes, and beating his breast, he cried, 'God be merciful to me a sinner'; and as he went home, something told him that it was good 'to fall into the hands of God.' Yes, it is true, as George Herbert says—

Solomon's sea of brass and temple of stone
Were not so pleasing to God as—one good groan.

There are two kinds of separation from God: and it is better to be a poor sinner than a proud saint.

De Profundis

Luke xviii. 13.—'God be merciful to me a sinner.'
Rom. vii. 24.—'O wretched man that I am!'

Of all sorrow the sorrow for sin may well be—nay, always should be—the deepest and most poignant. The sorrow of the bereaved, of Rachel weeping for her children, the sorrow of broken friendship, of David mourning for Jonathan, the sorrow of calamity and affliction, of Job overwhelmed with misfortunes—all these are real sorrows, but they fall short of the sorrow of contrition. There is no sorrow equal to the sorrow of a 'broken and a contrite heart.'

Read the 51st Psalm. Read the parable of the Publican in the Temple. Read Paul's autobiographical description of the 'wretched man' in the 7th of Romans. Read St Augustine's confessions. Read Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*. Read the story of Martin Luther's conversion. And you will understand something of the sorrow that springs from the lowest depth.

¶ Lucy Snowe, in conversation with Paul Emanuel, her Roman Catholic lover, says: 'When I thought of sin and sorrow, of earthly corruption, mortal depravity, weighty temporal woe—I could not care for chanting priests or mumming officials; when the pains of existence and the terrors of dissolution pressed upon me—when the mighty hope and measureless doubt of the future rose to view—then even the scientific strain or the prayer in a language learned and dead, harassed with hindrance a heart which only longed to cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

'When I had so spoken, so declared my faith,' she goes on, 'and so widely severed myself from him I addressed—then, at last, came a tone accordant, an echo responsive, one sweet chord of harmony in two conflicting spirits.'

'Whatever say priests or controversialists,' replied Paul, 'God is good and loves all the sincere. Believe, then, what you can; believe it as you can; one prayer, at least, we have in common; I also cry—"God be merciful to me a sinner!"'[1]

What, then, is the sorrow for sin, as distinguished from sorrow which is called forth by special circumstances?

1. It is a deep look into one's own heart.—Rarely do men seriously and deliberately make

[1] Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*.

this attempt. They look at themselves in the glass, and they think they recognize themselves. Yet what they see there is only the reflection of the features; they themselves are unknown to themselves. Most men are *incognito* to themselves. David thought he knew himself tolerably well until Nathan narrated to him that touching little story about the ewe lamb, and drove home the application of the story in the simple but crushing statement, 'Thou art the man.' And it was not until that moment, two years after his adultery with Bathsheba, that the truth flashed upon him, and covering his face with his hands to hide his shame he said, 'I have sinned.'

O wad some pow'r the giftie gie us
To see oursels as others see us!
It wad frae monie a blunder free us,
An' foolish notion.

So writes Burns. But to see ourselves as others see us is not equivalent to seeing ourselves as we are. Even our neighbours do not know us any better than we know ourselves, if we have never plumbed the depths of our own hearts. Human life, as men and women promenade before each other, and as they endeavour to keep up appearances, is one thing. And human life as it is lived out of sight and observation, and in the secret chambers of one's own heart, is quite another. And this last is the real man, the man whose character will stand revealed; not the man as others see us, but the man as he is in his deepest essence, and in his inmost thoughts and desires.

This deep look into one's own heart—what does it disclose? That I am not in harmony with the moral law of the universe. That in myself there are two natures, a higher and a lower, and that these are in conflict the one with the other; that, in fact, I am a 'house divided against itself,' that I am weakness personified, and that, whilst I approve the right and do the wrong, I am almost powerless to restrain my evil thoughts and my evil propensities.

Is it possible for one to become one's own bitter and implacable enemy? Surely! Milton makes the great Protagonist say:—

Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell;
And in the lowest deep a lower deep,
Still threatening to devour me, opens wide.

Then out of this consciousness of one's own moral perversion springs the sense of sin, which is a sense of our unworthiness and guilt. Shame and sorrow mingle their feelings. Conviction takes hold of us. There is nothing for us but to cry out, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' Yet we may know ourselves to that extent without any acute sense of sin. The facts may be admitted without their import being sufficiently realized. There are many who adopt the publican's prayer, but without the publican's tears.

2. If we take a deep look into the perfect law of God we see that the perfection of God is in His holiness. And His perfect law is that holiness embodied and revealed in Jesus Christ—a holiness alive to truth, but more especially alive to mercy. Jesus Christ is the supreme standard of moral excellence. He is the Image to which in our highest and best moods we would attain.

But no sooner do we begin to look to God and endeavour to tread in His paths than we discover how strong and deep-seated are the antagonisms of our lower nature to any such proceeding. 'The body of this death'—this huge mass of moral corruptions and inertia—effectually blocks the way. We would be right with God, but the thing is impracticable. We would aspire to purity and unselfishness of character, but the task is beyond our strength.

And now comes the poignancy of sorrow, when we see ourselves in the light of God's immaculate holiness and realize how far short we come of that standard. The more we know of God, the more we know of ourselves. The more exalted our thoughts of Him, the more humiliating our thoughts of ourselves.[1]

¶ When the crisis of his inner life overtook him Wilberforce says: 'The deep guilt and black ingratitude of my past life forced itself upon me in the strongest colours; and I condemned myself for having wasted my precious time and talents. It was not so much the fear of punishment as a sense of my great sinfulness. Such was the effect which this thought produced that for months I was in a state of the deepest depression from strong conviction of my guilt!'

It was then, at the age of twenty-six, that his soul gathered itself up in one great and bitter

[1] T. Sanderson, *Unfulfilled Designs*, 55.

cry. 'God be merciful to me a sinner!' he implored; and, on receiving an assurance that his prayer was heard—as all such prayers must be—he breaks out in a new strain. 'What infinite love,' he says, 'that Christ should die to save *such a sinner*!'[1]

But that which threatened to be our ruin is in reality our salvation. It is in the depths that we find Him who has descended into the depths to find us. Emptied of all merit and of all power in ourselves, we are led to trust in the redeeming mercy of God. Christ, and Christ alone, becomes the sole ground of our confidence and hope.

None other Lamb, none other Name,
  None other hope in heaven, or earth, or sea,
None other hiding-place from guilt and shame,
    None beside Thee.

My faith burns low, my hope burns low,
  Only my heart's desire cries out in me
By the deep thunder of its want and woe,
    Cries out to Thee.

Lord, Thou art life, though I be dead,
  Love's fire Thou art, however cold I be;
Nor heaven have I, nor place to lay my head,
    Nor home but Thee.[2]

And now we understand how it is that only good men, or those on the point of becoming good, are the most truly penitent. They know God, and that knowledge perfects their self-knowledge. They see themselves reflected in God's perfect law, and that is a reflection that shows up all the weaknesses and defects of their own character. Just as the dinginess of a dingy room is best seen, not on a dingy day, but when the room is filled with light, and when the faded colours, and the threadbare texture, and the cracks and the creases stand out in the clear shining of the sun.

I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear,
  But now mine eye seeth Thee;
Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent
  In dust and ashes.

[1] F. W. Boreham, *A Bunch of Everlastings*, 189.
[2] Christina G. Rossetti.

We Stoop to Rise

Luke xviii. 14.—'He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.'

In the great scheme for realizing the ideal Christian life that was framed by St Benedict of Monte Cassino—the Rule which became the standard for all the monasteries of the West, and which embodied for all time the leading principles of Western Monachism—the virtue which is insisted on as of primary importance for the development of Christian character is the virtue of humility. The life of the Christian is figured as a kind of Jacob's ladder, reaching up from earth to heaven, and the rungs of the ladder are the twelve forms or degrees of humility. Some of these forms, as described by St Benedict, touch the holiest and most intimate relations of the soul with God; others are little more than rules of religious deportment and etiquette. The point of interest, however, is, not the description of the various forms, but the emphasis laid by one of the greatest and most influential masters of the spiritual life on humility itself as the indispensable condition of all Christian attainment. Without humility—without 'that stoop of the soul which in bending upraises it too'—there is no possibility of moral or spiritual elevation. It is by the ladder of lowliness alone that one can ascend to the heights of religious blessedness, and attain ultimately, as St Benedict puts it, to 'that love of God which is perfect and casteth out fear.'

Many of us are apt to be somewhat disdainful of such teaching. We make light of this strong insistence on the all-importance of humility, and put it summarily aside as a quaint example of the eccentricity of the monkish type of mind. But are we justified in doing so? Right through the New Testament, from the beginning to the end, the humble attitude is represented as the only attitude possible for a Christian man. Humility is the condition of entering the Christian life at all. Humility is also the condition of all advancement in that life. The first of all the lessons which the Christian disciple has to learn is the lesson of humility. And the lesson which he has to re-learn, again and again and again, at every stage of his way, as he treads in the footsteps of his Master, is still the lesson of humility. Yes, in Gospel and Epistle alike, humility is set before us un-

ambiguously and consistently as the foundation of Christian virtue, the mainspring of Christian conduct, and the essential element of Christian character; and St Augustine was strictly in line with the great Scriptural authorities when he wrote to one who had made enquiry concerning the Christian way of life, 'That way is first humility, and second humility, and third humility; and how often soever you might repeat the question, I should give you this reply.' [1]

What, then, is Christian humility? What is this grace, this virtue which is the condition of all development of the Christian life and character?

1. *It is no mere affair of posture and pose.*—Where it is a pose it is inevitably hypocritical. There is a cant of humility which is positively odious, because it is utterly insincere, a mere cloak which hides cunning and self-seeking. The genius of Dickens portrayed that loathsome type—smirking, shifty, treacherous—once for all in Uriah Heep.

¶ Could any scene be more compelling than the incident my brother Alfred told of a walk he took with the G.O.M. at Hawarden, when, soon after the start, the latter interrupted the copious talk by stopping outside a cottage in which lay an old labourer dying? From outside Alfred saw the picture of the white-haired statesman kneeling by the sick man's bedside, and with the beautiful face uplifted, while words simple, stately, and sincere were being uttered in the deep expressive tones that had touched the hearts of listening millions in every corner of the land. But more impressive, more eloquent of the higher life, was the utterly genuine self-forgetfulness with which he presently rose up and resumed the conversation, wholly unconscious that he had been acting differently from the common run of men.[2]

2. *It does not consist in self-depreciation.*—It does not mean underrating ourselves, or being blind to our knowledge and powers. If a man can do certain things better than other men, he usually knows it, and Christian humility does not require him to be ignorant of it. It only requires him to be lowly-minded along with it and not to over-value himself.

¶ 'I believe that the first test of the truly great man is his humility. I do not mean by humility doubt of his own powers, or hesitation to speak his opinions. . . . Arnolfo knows that he can build a good dome at Florence. Albert Dürer writes calmly, to one who has found fault with his work, that it cannot be better done. Isaac Newton knows that he has worked out a problem or two that would have puzzled anyone else. Only they do not expect their fellowmen to fall down and worship them. They have a curious under-sense of powerlessness, feeling that the greatness is not *in* them but through them.' [1]

3. *Humility is not a synonym for weakness.*—Humility is strength. Against true humility temptation and tyranny break in vain. All goodness which is not humble can be seduced, all greatness which is not purged of pride can be tripped up. What breaks oppression in this world is not, strangely enough, the pride of resistance, but the humility of non-resistance. Humility is so strong that it needs no outside aid, fears no force that can be brought against it, breaks the weapons of hostility on its bare breast, sucks the poison of hate, and remains unharmed, buries evil beneath its own goodness, conquers enmity by love, swallows up death in victory.

¶ There is a mediæval story concerning the Devil, which gives quite a different picture of the Prince of Darkness from the one usually presented. The Devil, meeting a certain saint, tried his utmost to overcome him both by guile and force, but failed abjectly in his enterprise, and in the end owned himself beaten. 'Why is it, think you,' said he to the saint, 'that I could not prevail over you? You fancy it is because you abstain from all delights of sense—but I am much more abstemious than you. You think it is because you are deeply versed in the Scriptures—but I, the Devil, know them by heart. Your fastings and vigils are nothing to mine, but I could not subdue you because your humility was with you—and I, being the Devil, have no humility.' [2]

4. *Humility is the sense of dependence.*—There is not a blessing that we enjoy, whether physical or spiritual, whether inherited or

[1] F. H. Dudden, *The Dead and the Living*, 95.
[2] E. Lyttelton, *Memories and Hopes*, 245.

[1] Ruskin.
[2] J. Warschauer, *The Way of Understanding*, 150.

acquired, that is not a gift of the grace of God. If we have faith, it is only because God has been pleased to reveal His Son in us. If we have love, it is only because God first loved us. If we have goodness, it is still of God; for 'every virtue we possess, and every victory won, and every thought of holiness, are His alone.' When once we realize this truth, what room is left for boasting? Had our powers, our virtues, our noble endowments been our own—of our own creation and manufacture—we might have had reason for self-complacency. But since all of them are gifts, why, there is not a loophole through which pride can legitimately enter in. Who are we, after all, that we should be thus richly blessed? What have we done, that such great mercies should be lavished so abundantly on us? Why should we have opportunities which are denied to other men? We can take no credit to ourselves. There is no basis at all for pride—for the feeling of self-satisfaction.

Who, should their own life plaudits bring,
Are simply vex'd at heart that such
An easy, yea, delightful thing
Should move the minds of men so much.[1]

5. *Humility is the laying aside of self.*—Who are the men to whom the community is most deeply and most permanently indebted? Are they not the humble men? Are they not the men who can lay aside the thought of self, who can sink themselves, forget themselves, in their God-appointed work? Are they not the men who simply take their work from God, and say, 'Let me be nothing; let my work be everything'?

¶ It is said that Lincoln once was strongly pressed by his advisers to introduce a measure for which he was convinced that his country was not ready. He urged them in turn to go back again to their homes, and commence an agitation, and rouse the public mind, that the nation might support him when he should see fit to take action. And he ended his speech with the words, 'Do not be afraid of hurting me. Do not spare me at all.'

It is this spirit of selfless humility that we find in all who have rendered worthy service to humanity. We find it in the martyrs, in the patriots, in the reformers, in the leaders of forlorn hopes, in the redressers of mighty wrongs. We find it in heroes like Gordon, concerning whom Laurence Oliphant said, 'What was so extraordinarily attractive to me in him was his underlying meekness and contempt of himself except as an instrument for Divine ends'; and we find it also in common soldiers, willing, as we have seen recently, to swamp themselves and all their interests and affections and ambitions in the movement of a holy crusade. And, above all, we find it in Him who, though the Greatest of the great, was nevertheless 'meek and lowly in heart,' who 'made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and . . . humbled himself, and became obedient unto death,' that by His incomparable condescension He might redeem the world. Christ Himself is the cardinal Exemplar of His own words: He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Our Lord calls us, indeed, to the lowest rooms, to obscure ministries and homely duties; He sets us ever among the minorities; yet they who learn of Him shall find rest unto their souls, and they who humble themselves in His service in due time shall be exalted.

The bird that soars on highest wing
Builds on the ground her lowly nest;
And she that doth most sweetly sing
Sings in the shade when all things rest:
In lark and nightingale we see
What honour hath humility.

The saint that wears heaven's brightest crown
In deepest adoration bends;
The weight of glory bows him down
The most when most his soul ascends,
Nearest the throne itself must be
The footstool of humility.[1]

[1] Coventry Patmore.

The Children's Charter

Luke xviii. 16.—'Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.'

We have come naturally to regard these beautiful words as the great gospel invitation to children—the charter, if we may so describe them, by which the privileges of His Kingdom are secured to the youngest of God's little ones. And that undoubtedly they are. At

[1] Montgomery.

the same time, we must not forget that it was not to the children themselves, but to the disciples, that they were directly addressed. They were not in the first instance so much an invitation to the children to come, as a rebuke to those who would hinder the children from coming. And it is only as we look at them in their bearing upon all the actors in the scene which the gospel story calls up before us that we can understand their deepest significance.

The Maister sat in a wee cot hoose
  Tae the Jordan's waters near,
An' the fisher fowk crush'd an' croodit roun'
  The Maister's words tae hear.

An' even the bairns frae the near-haun' streets
  War mixin' in wi' the thrang,
Laddies an' lassies wi' wee bare feet,
  Jinkin' the crood amang.

An' ane o' the Twal' at the Maister's side
  Rase up an' cried alood—
'Come, come, bairns, this is nae place for you,
  Rin awa' hame oot o' the crood.'

But the Maister said, as they turned awa',
  'Lat the wee bairns come tae Me!'
An' He gaithered them roun' Him whaur He sat,
  An' liftit ane up on His knee.

Ay He gaithered them roun' Him whaur He sat
  An' straikit their curly hair,
An' He said tae the won'erin' fisher fowk
  That croodit aroun' Him there:

'Sen' na the weans awa' frae Me,
  But raither this lesson learn—
That nane'll win in at heaven's yett
  That isna as pure as a bairn.'

An' He that wisna oor kith an' kin,
  But a Prince o' the Far Awa',
Gaithered the wee anes in His airms,
  An' blessed them ane an' a'.[1]

1. The loving act which Jesus is here represented as performing adds only one to the many tender and gracious acts of which the gospel pages are full; but it is one which we feel that we could not well do without. In many another well-remembered scene we see Jesus as He dealt with the sins and with the weakness, with the doubts and with the sorrows, of the men and women with whom He came in contact. But were these all the scenes in which the power and the work of Christ were manifested, should we not still feel that there was a blank? They show us how the Saviour deals with sinning and sorrowing men and women, how He offers to them release, and claims them as His own. But what of the children, the helpless little ones in their unconscious infancy, ignorant as yet of their calling, or of what awaits them in the future? Are they to wait until they have knowingly sinned and suffered before they can seek Christ, before He can find them? Or are they His already? Is He even now claiming them as members of His Heavenly Kingdom? That, surely, is what our gospel story assures us of.

¶ There is a significant story of the great sculptor Danneker, that, when he was working at his statue of Christ, he took a little girl into his studio, and placing her before the figure asked her what she thought of it. For a moment the little one hesitated, and then replied, 'He was a great Man.' The sculptor was disappointed: that was not the ideal he had set before himself. But again he went bravely to work, toning down this line, throwing more expression into this feature, until at length it seemed to him that he had succeeded. And so it proved. For when again the child was permitted to gaze upon the wonderful figure, there was no longer any hesitancy in her words as she exclaimed, 'That was the Christ who said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me!"'

2. If this be so, we can understand, to pass from the Master to the disciples, how naturally Jesus would be moved with indignation against them for seeking to keep the children away from Him. To them the whole business was an interruption. They were not really heartless, but they felt that they were people of importance with work to do. And there was also this young ruler hovering about in the offing, who at the time might have made a considerable addition to the adherents to the Christian faith. They were not purposely harsh, but had they been left to have their own way, the children would not have rested in the Saviour's arms, or had His words of blessing pronounced upon them.

[1] William Thomson.

And regarded in this light, do not the disciples become a warning to all who in any way hinder the spread of Christ's truth amongst His little ones? They may or may not do so consciously, but still by their lives and conversation they come between the children and Christ.

We all know how easily influenced children are. They are keenly alive to all that is going on around them: they see and understand and follow far more than we sometimes imagine: and they incline most readily to the force of example, wherever it may lead. There is surely, then, a very solemn responsibility laid upon all who are in any way brought into contact with children, to see that their influence and example tend to what is good and not to what is evil, tend to draw the children nearer to Christ, rather than to hinder their approach to Him. We cannot too earnestly strive to present the religion of Christ before them in all its simplicity and in all its love, that their hearts may respond to the glad tidings intended also for them.

¶ In that pathetic scene in which Charles Dickens describes the death of Jo, you will remember how Jo, in answer to the question whether he ever knew a prayer, told how, 'different times, there was gen'l'men come down Tom-all-Alone's a-prayin', but they all mostly sed as the t'other wuns prayed wrong, and all mostly sounded to be a-talkin' to theirselves, or a-passin' blame on the t'others, and not a'talkin' to us. *We* never know'd nothink. *I* never know'd what it wos all about.' [1]

3. But if the disciples are thus a warning to all who in any way are keeping back the children from Christ, in the mothers of our story we have an example of those eager and ready to present their babes to Him.

It is more than a genealogical notice, it is a testimony to character, when in the Books of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah and Israel we read of such and such a king, and his mother's name was so and so, 'and he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord.'

¶ The souls of little children are marvellously delicate and tender things, and keep for ever the shadow that first falls on them, and that is the mother's or at best a woman's. There was never a great man who had not a great mother—it is hardly an exaggeration. The first six years of our life make us.[1]

¶ 'The older I grow,' says Thomas Carlyle, 'and I am now upon the brink of eternity, the more comes back to me the first sentence of the Catechism which I learned when a child, and the fuller and deeper its meaning becomes, "What is the chief end of man? To glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever."'

We know for ourselves that the best lessons of our lives were the *first* lessons? How much sin and sorrow we should have been spared if we had always been true to them! But one thing we can do—we can seek to train up those coming after us in the knowledge and love of their Heavenly Father: we can show them that 'fear of the Lord' which is the beginning of all true wisdom: and we can warn them against those dangers and temptations into which we ourselves have fallen.

The obligation rests upon all; but in a special sense it rests upon those who are parents. Let them be faithful to their trust. Let them endeavour loyally to fulfil the vows they took upon them when they presented their children to God in baptism. And then in the great Day of Account they will appear before God with joy, bringing their children with them.

The Spirit of Wonder

Luke xviii. 17.—'Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.'

Of all the unwritten sayings of Christ recorded in early Christian literature there is none perhaps which, besides being supported by high external authority, shines upon us with so much authority of inner light as this: 'He that wonders shall be king.'

When we reflect upon the repeated connection in the New Testament of the spirit of Christianity and the spirit of childhood, do we not find that the connection is, in part at least, suggested by the fact that the spirit of childhood is the spirit of freshness, of enthusiasm, of wonder? To the child nothing is too trifling to become the object of serious and surprised attention. Before he can speak the small creature has risen to the temper of the

[1] *Bleak House.*

[1] Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm*, 209.

true philosopher: everything in the world is wonderful to him. But, as time goes on, the wonder fades; the fresh feeling, the simple enthusiasm, the vivid and inquiring interest die away. Parents, as well as poets, looking on with bitter regret at the change, have seen the child lose those 'clouds of glory,' and take upon him, all too soon, 'the inevitable yoke' of life; and so keenly do we miss that old wonder that those who keep it in later years always stand out distinct from their fellows in every department of thought and action. The childlike spirit is the last consecration of a noble character. They who possess it are 'kings.' They find more in religion than others do, more in Nature, and more in human life.

1. Few things strike the student of *history* more forcibly than the contrast between the fresh spirit of Christianity and the dull and jaded spirit of the age in which it was given to the world. As we look round upon the various activities, moral or intellectual, then visible, we find, from this point of view, little to cheer and much to depress. Men are tired of confronting the Sphinx. Nobody has anything hopeful to contribute to the solution of the ever-pressing problem—What is Man, what is his destiny, and why is he here? A hardness and a deadness have settled down like a cloud on the world's enthusiasm. There is no vision here worth the name, and the people are perishing.

> On that hard, pagan world disgust
> And secret loathing fell;
> Deep weariness and sated lust
> Made human life a hell.

But just where, to the historic eye, the apathy seems greyest and deepest, there appears among the many claimants to men's hearing a little child, facing the world and the future with the large eyes of faith and hope. It is the Church of Christ. Christ is making all things new. He is bringing back the young enthusiasm. He has not only given men a quite new solution of the world-problem in His own work and person; He has also indicated for them a new attitude to the moral facts of life.

For, on the one hand, Christianity, like art, is the apotheosis of the commonplace. It gives us a child's spirit of wonder for all things spiritual. It teaches us to find a surprising beauty even in those little acts of sympathy which are, indeed, too beautiful to pass unnoticed. It teaches us to see good everywhere—not merely in those who shine like stars in the forefront of the world, but also in the meek and lowly.

¶ 'I love everything human,' wrote Montagu Butler. 'This love for all human seems to me almost the only definite conviction in my mind. For art, music, history, political economy or any of the exact sciences I am singularly unfitted except in so far as they bring out human character. I love novels which succeed in this, and those best whose characters are exalted as well as true. I believe thoroughly in unconscious goodness and faith.'[1]

On the other hand, by inspiring this fresh enthusiasm and interest, it attacks the deadness which custom is too apt to bring, identifies itself with the spirit of true progress; and substitutes a spiritual liberty for a routine imposed from without. For custom, routine, symbols are of use only so long as they foster life and growth, and leave room for enthusiasm and fresh insight; but the moment that the individual who follows them begins to act and think as if the whole world were measured and known by him; the moment his habits, instead of guiding and controlling, begin to crush, to deaden, to stifle—then at once they become worse than useless, putting a fatal curb on the free activity of faith. Lived in such an atmosphere and under such conditions, the Christian life degenerates with fearful rapidity into a narrow, if not hypocritical, formalism. Let us rather try to cherish that simple and large-minded reverence without which we can neither enter into the Kingdom of Heaven nor stay there if we have entered. Let us take our stand by Augustine's side when, in his attempt to comprehend God and spiritual things, he compares himself with a child trying to pour the sea into a shell.

2. It is only this childlike spirit that takes possession of the Kindgom of God in *Nature*. Science and philosophy, as Plato saw, originate in wonder. They are the sign and result of man's perpetual astonishment at the earth of which he finds himself a part. And in a truly

[1] J. R. M. Butler, *Henry Montagu Butler*, 231.

great scientist wonder is only deepened by research. Newton is always Newton gathering pebbles by the shore of an infinite sea. And those of us who are not scientists may at least use this faculty of wonder for the common things of sight and hearing.

It is the childlike spirit of Christianity that, making all things new, makes new to us the beauty of the world. And though many a modern writer or artist helps us in this direction, the Christian spirit helps us most, seeing in Nature the revelation, as well as the veil, of God, and finding in the things of sense the types and symbols of an eternal beauty.

¶ Study Nature. Do not study matter for its own sake, but as the countenance of God. Try to extract every line of beauty, every association, every moral reflection, every inexpressible feeling, from it. Study the forms and colours of leaves and flowers, and the growth and habits of plants, not to classify them, but to admire them and adore God.[1]

Elder father, though thine eyes
Shine with hoary mysteries,
Canst thou tell what in the heart
Of a cowslip blossom lies?

Smaller than all lives that be,
Secret as the deepest sea,
Stands a little house of seeds
Like an elfin's granary.

Speller of the stones and weeds,
Skilled in Nature's crafts and creeds,
Tell me what is in the heart
Of the smallest of the seeds.

God Almighty, and with Him
Cherubim and Seraphim,
Filling all eternity—
Adonai Elohim.[2]

3. Lastly, it is the child who enters the Kingdom of God in *human life*. It is here, perhaps, that we see most clearly the Divinely recuperative power of Christianity, and can best understand what Christ means by the new birth, the rising into a higher life, of which He speaks so often.

There are, for instance, the men and women who have been caught in the whirlpool of society; whose interests have been narrowed, and whose souls have been dwarfed, by a perpetual round of social engagements; who rarely, if ever, arouse themselves and look about them and see what the true qualities of such a life must be—its flatness and unprofitableness, its narrowness, its dull stupidity. Or there are the men and women who, in the race of life, have proved untrue to their higher nature, either because they have fallen from the purity of their childhood, and left a stain upon their life not easy to wipe out, or because, more generally, they have suffered the hunt for profit and position or the growth of professional ambitions and habits, to interfere with their true development. Where can such find redemption save at the feet of Him who makes all things new? Happy in such a case is the man who discovers his mistake before it is too late, and is strong enough to say, like Ibsen's Nora, I will go away and find—*myself*.

For the spirit of wonder does not merely find a source of teaching in the past history of man—in his various energies and manifestations, in his struggles and aspirations, in his approximations to the Divine ideal. It also makes great the ordinary work and duty of common life. Our work and our friendship are the two things that fill up the chief space in our passing days; and in both this childlike spirit of Christianity helps us to win the crown.

(1) In daily work we put too often from us the great ideals because our work seems narrow, dull and colourless, or wanting in the opportunities for which we fancy ourselves most fitted; and yet Carlyle was not the only one to see that 'the situation without its ideal' has never yet existed: 'The situation that has not its duty, its ideal, was never yet occupied by man. Yes, here, in this poor, miserable, hampered, despicable actual, wherein thou even now standest, here or nowhere is thy ideal; work it out therefrom, and working, believe, live, be free.' Nor was St Francis de Sales the only one to feel that 'the true saint is not the man who does extraordinary things, but he who does ordinary things extraordinarily well.' Rather, perhaps, there is nothing ordinary in the work of daily life; all, if rightly looked at, is wonderful, could we but keep our sight undimmed by custom and long habit.

[1] *Life and Letters of Charles Kingsley*, 33.
[2] G. K. Chesterton.

¶ Mrs Coulson Kernahan writes: 'I personally knew a great scientist who began life as a farm labourer. From his very earliest years the subject of embryology had fascinated him. But, as his father worked on a farm, so automatically he went to work on a farm. What attracted the attention of his master was the extreme care with which he performed every duty. No implements were left out to rust after being used. No imposed task was forgotten. He was never a moment idle. But he did not like his work. Nevertheless, in the rough surgery of the farm-yard, he got his first lessons in anatomy. His chance came through the insight of a veterinary surgeon, who, perceiving his special talent, spoke to a local doctor about him. This doctor took him as an apprentice, and helped him with fees for qualification as a doctor. He had had only the education afforded by an elementary school up to the time the village doctor took him up. He rose to be a great embryologist of whom Huxley said, "He writes anatomy for anatomists." I only knew him as a white-haired man, but I am quite certain, from what he was then, that as a boy he made nobility of the commonplace work of the farm-yard.'[1]

(2) And as of work, so of friendship. Few can have read the Meditations of the great Aurelius without being touched by the pathos of that opening book in which he records his debts to his friends and teachers. But how many of us feel, as we should do, in the ordinary intercourse of life, the abiding wonder of the human personality? To every human creature whom we know we should be able to say: 'You have made my life deeper for me. You have given me what I had not before. Something I owe to you. Something I am to-day which I was not before I knew you.' And similarly on *our* part and for *our* duty of good influence over those with whom we have to do, it should—to take the poet's metaphor of the stage—be our endeavour so to act that, before the curtain falls and the footlights are blown out, we may not only have played our part nobly in the little drama, but also have helped others so to play their own.

[1] *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, May 1926.

The Rich Ruler

Luke xviii. 18.—'A certain ruler.'

THE story of the young ruler is one of the most interesting and illuminative incidents in the Gospels. There is a charm and attractiveness about the young man that delight every reader. He was, undoubtedly, one who belonged to the best type of the earnest religious class of his day. He was a character very much after Jesus' own heart, for we are told that the Master loved him the moment He saw him. This means something more than His general love to every member of the human race. It denotes that special kinship of soul which is the real basis of every genuine friendship. Let us see if we can discover the qualities in the young man that called forth this feeling.

1. *Courage.*—Nicodemus, another ruler, came at first to Jesus by night—for fear of the Jews. This ruler came in broad daylight, when the road was thronged with people going to the Passover; and, in the sight of them all, ran up to Christ and knelt before Him; and, in their hearing, addressed the Nazarene as 'Good Master.' In the face of class-prejudice, against the prevailing sentiment of the upper classes in Jerusalem, this man came up to Jesus—Jesus from Galilee, who had no social and material accessories to give Him importance in the eyes of the world, and assumed the deferential attitude of a learner.

2. *Idealism.*—The young man had a great and noble purpose, and could express it clearly. To him spiritual values seemed supreme. We are bound to say 'seemed,' for the sequel of the story shows he had not thought them out to their final issues. But, so far as he knew, he was prepared to do anything in his power to attain the highest ends. 'Good Teacher,' he cried, 'what am I to do to inherit life eternal?' His mind was open to the best thought of the day, and in terms of that thought he uttered his great desire.

¶ There are few finer sights than to see a human soul prompted by the best and purest impulses. There is so much materialism always prevalent in life, that the 'dreamer of dreams' is a welcome variety. Besides, it is to them that the race owes all its progress. They are

the really practical people, for they see first and proclaim the possibilities. They announce the goal which not they alone, but others, also may reach. Like Arnold of Rugby, in his son's poem:

> There are some, whom a thirst,
> Ardent, unquenchable, fires,
> Not with the crowd to be spent,
> Not without aim to go round
> In an eddy of purposeless dust,
> Effort unmeaning and vain.[1]

3. *Sincerity.*—When the young man was brought up against the challenge of the moral law he was able to say that he had obeyed its precepts. He was not one of those who deceived either himself or others. He was neither a hypocrite nor a prig. He knew how serious life was, and up to his lights he had endeavoured to order his life by the best standards. In our search for truth this is essential. Truth is a moral even more than an intellectual attainment, and we cannot reach our goal unless we are able to judge ourselves by the sternest principles. Self-deception is easy but disastrous, and the prayer of the Hebrew poet is always essential:

Search me, O God, and know my heart:
Try me, and know my thoughts:
And see if there be any way of wickedness in me,
And lead me in the way everlasting.

¶ 'We must not,' says A. D. Belden, 'take our moral health for granted.'

One of the most beautiful and touching features of Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* is the character of a Buddhist priest who upon one occasion is ill-treated and robbed in the mountains. It will be remembered that the priest's great concern was not to discover and punish the thieves, although he was urged to do so, but, by earnest prayer and self-denial, to discover *what was wrong in his own spiritual condition*, that he should attract such a calamity as that.

4. *Sacrifice.*—Truth always involves action. It is no merely mental process, however careful and thorough. It belongs to the whole being, and demands obedience to its own behests, which persistent discovery has only made more clear. The young man's wonderful progress entailed one further step. Jesus was not mocking him when He said, 'One thing thou lackest.' The further step was the crown of his career. Was he prepared to take it? Here was the crucial test.

¶ Truth has always had, and must ever have, her martyrs—Socrates, Buddha, Luther, Galileo, Dante, Columbus, and above all Jesus Himself, have made this amply evident. Their lives are the story of this way of the Cross, which Truth lays upon its followers. Lowell has put it into memorable words:

> Then to side with Truth is noble when we share
> her wretched crust,
> Ere her cause bring fame and profit, and 'tis
> prosperous to be just;
> Then it is the brave man chooses, while the
> coward stands aside,
> Doubting in his abject spirit, till his Lord is
> crucified,
> And the multitude make virtue of the faith
> they had denied.[1]

[1] *Rugby Chapel.*

The Self-judgment of Christ

Luke xviii. 19.—'Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God.'

1. It is part of the faith of the Church that Christ did no sin. This is undeniably a tremendous thought, and it is good for us to consider at times the grounds upon which this belief is based.

We are sometimes met upon the very threshold of the subject with the objection that Jesus is recorded on one occasion to have expressly disclaimed any such thing as moral perfection: for when goodness was ascribed to Him by the rich young man, He declined it in the words, 'Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God.'

But it must be remembered that this reply is relative to the circumstances, and to the particular individual to whom it was spoken. The young man called Christ good in the conventional superficial way in which great terms are often employed. This gave our Lord the suggestion on which to base His answer.

[1] *The Present Crisis.*

The answer was that, strictly speaking, the term goodness is applicable to none but Deity. For the goodness of a man is acquired: that of God is natural. All human goodness is relative to human limitations: it matures with man's development. And even if the growth were free from sin, yet the goodness of man could never be measurable with that of the Uncreated. And the appropriateness of this reply to the young man's challenge is obvious enough. He came to Christ with a somewhat serene consciousness of goodness already achieved, and with the question what else there was to do to win the approval of God. And Christ met him with the somewhat disconcerting reminder that the goodness of God is immeasurably beyond that realized by man. Goodness was a greater and a deeper thing than the young man understood.

2. Among the main lines of evidence to show what Christ thought about His moral state—what was the self-judgment of Christ—three may be selected.

(1) Consider what Christ said about *His Death*. In the upper chamber in Jerusalem, on the very night before He died, He was talking to the Twelve about His death. He said that His blood was shed for others and for the forgiveness of sins. In face of a death, whose horror He keenly felt, He was able to say that His death would take away from the hearts of other men the burden of sin. From the hearts of others! But who is to take away that burden from the heart of Christ? If He were conscious, like the rest, of moral guilt, then someone must be found to mediate for Him. As Herrmann truly says: 'Jesus could not have spoken as He then did if He had been conscious of guilt within Himself.'

(2) What He said about *the Judgment*. He asserted that the time would come when a judgment would be passed upon every human career, a judgment which would be perfect and therefore subject to no revision—unerring, irrevocable, Divine. And when we ask by whom that judgment shall be given, expecting, of course, the answer that the judge is God, we find that in the place of judgment Jesus sets, not the Father, but Himself.

Now what does this imply as to the moral condition of the Judge? He, too, is human like the rest. What must His moral self-judgment have been who, being human, put the entire human race on the one side and Himself on the other, and considered their relation to be that of a judge towards the self-condemned?

(3) Thirdly, and certainly not less impressive, is the witness of *Christ's Prayers*. We commonly analyse prayer in the following kinds: petitions for ourselves, intercessions for others, thanksgivings for gifts received, praise of the glories of God, and last, but certainly not least, the prayer to be forgiven. All these, especially the last, find a place in the religion of all good men. And this element of penitence intensifies with moral growth.

Now it has been rightly argued that if Jesus were but an exceedingly excellent but imperfect human being then we should find the element of penitence in His prayers with an intensity corresponding to His moral loftiness. As the hymn has it:

> 'They who fain would serve Thee best
> Are conscious most of wrong within.'

But as a fact, what is it that we find? We have many prayers of Christ, and some of them are of considerable length. They contain petitions, intercessions, thanksgiving and praise. But there is throughout one most singular omission. They never contain the element of penitence, the prayer to be forgiven. Christ is conscious, as other men are not, of a communion with the Father uninterrupted by the slightest trace of sin.

¶ In Christ the appearance even of a conversion is impossible. His first words and His last are spoken with the same accents; from the very beginning, the source whence they flow is limpid; it contains no sign of muddy depths, no stratum of impure sediment. From the first He is sure of Himself, outspoken, absolute. He speaks with the unmistakable authority of purity. His voice is strong, free and clear; it rings out harmoniously, unveiled either by the foul wine of indulgence or by the tears of repentance. The brightness of His glance and smile, and the lucidity of His thought have nothing of the clearness that follows the storm when the clouds have passed away, nor of the dim and uncertain light of dawn slowly conquering the shadows of night. His is the clearness of one who, born but once,

even in manhood has remained a child; the lucidity, the transparency, the serene peace of a day which will end in night indeed, but will know no shadow before evening; the clearness of an eternal, untroubled day, of a childhood that shall endure until death.[1]

3. The value of such a fact as unconsciousness of sin must depend on the moral standard which the individual possesses. No doubt there have been cases like that of the rich young man who, facing the Ten Commandments, could serenely say, All these have I kept from my youth. But it is difficult not to feel that he would have expressed himself very differently if confronted by Christ's interpretation of the moral ideal in the Sermon on the Mount. It is certain that he was not what he thought he was, for he failed in the test of the great renunciation to which Christ called him.

Apply this to the case of Christ. What was the moral standard by which Christ judged? We know quite well what it was. It was that contained in the Sermon on the Mount. It is the most disconcerting standard that ever was. It takes our breath away. It talks of being perfect even as our Father in Heaven is perfect. Think of it! It talks of penetrating down beneath actions to the secret intentions of the heart, and of judging the value of the deeds and words by the value of the innermost self. Men have since that day found out many inventions. They have not invented a more unearthly moral ideal than the standard propounded by Christ. Is it too much to say that they never will?

And this is the standard by which He judged Himself. Tried, then, by this standard of the Sermon on the Mount, this austere, awful, confounding standard of perfection, Jesus was conscious of no defect. It is not merely negatively that He saw in Himself no sin. All that the Father was and loved Jesus also loved with all the powers of His human soul. His human mind was absorbed exclusively in all high thoughts. His human heart loved nothing but what was good. His human will was wholly directed to the achievement and promotion of the Will of the Father in Heaven.

Now sinlessness requires an explanation. All our experience is that there is no man that sinneth not. The lives of men and women mature through sin and penitence up to goodness it may be: but goodness marked by the fact that it has contracted sin. One conscious and deliberate yielding to sin, and sinlessness becomes impossible. The sins of childhood, boyhood, youth, remain in their effects within the man. Consequently, sinlessness in manhood means sinlessness in childhood, boyhood, and youth. It means a life within the world, yet never for a single moment of it.

¶ There is in the British Museum a famous statue of the Demeter of Cnidos. She is the Earth-Mother, and represents the reproductive forces of the world. Belonging to the dim vistas of a prehistoric age, she wears, in sculptured stone, the beauty of youth and yet the grace and dignity of motherhood. As we look at the serene and radiant triumph of her eyes—as of one who has waited long for the fruits of her travail—we seem to see the sunlight on the meadows and the waving of the golden corn whose sheaves are in her bosom. In her we find the culminating expression for the ancient Greek world of all its dreams of whatever is fruitful and lovely in this green and sunny earth.

But Jesus brings another and a higher message. He, too, can claim to be of the earth, flesh of our flesh, and yet a mystery envelops Him; for though He is Son of Man, and shares with us the gifts and powers and limitations of humanity, the light which He brings with Him has come from another world than this. He has known, and He can tell us, the secrets of a life which neither the worshippers of the Earth-Mother nor all the long line of Greek and Roman poets and thinkers were able to conceive.[1]

Assuredly such a character requires accounting for. There is only one reasonable explanation. It is that the sinlessness of Jesus is the result of an entirely unique relationship between Him and God. It is that in Christ dwelt the fullness of the Godhead bodily. It means a personal presence of Deity which enabled Him, through all the immaturities of childhood, boyhood and youth, to accomplish His redeeming task.

[1] G. Papini, *The Story of Christ*, 41.

[1] S. A. Alexander, in *The Guardian*, January 19, 1923.

Almsgiving

Luke xviii. 22.—'Sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.'

These words have been distorted and misrepresented, and therefore we ought to see quite clearly what they mean and what they do not mean. In the first place, they are not intended to supply a general rule for all Christians. It is a strange perversion and distortion of these words to wrest them—as a sentimental socialism has sometimes wrested them—into a general command to Christians to renounce their property. Christ did not mean to tear up the roots of society, or to propose a new social organization of any kind—and indeed, if we have any doubts on that subject, we have only to see how our Lord treated others with great or small possessions who came to Him.

Two cases will at once occur to us. First there is the case of Zacchæus, the rich publican. This man was rich, and his fortune had been partly, at any rate, accumulated by methods which were not above suspicion, yet he was not told to 'sell all that he had'; not a word was said to him as to the use of his money. But his own enlightened conscience and enlarged heart suggested the course which he voluntarily adopted. 'Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I (will) give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I (will) restore him fourfold.'

The other case is that of the two brothers, the younger of whom came to Christ with the request, 'Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.' But Christ refused to meddle with the work of redistributing property. It was not the sort of thing He had come to do. He worked on another plane of thought and life. And here, putting aside the particular request that had been made Him, He at once pierces below the surface and touches the sources and springs of character. Why these quarrels about property? Had they not yet to learn the only secret of true life? 'He said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.'

Why, then, did our Lord treat this young man so differently? Jesus did not go about preaching a general renunciation of property any more than a physician goes about preaching a general amputation of limbs; but He did warn men that it was better that one hand or one foot or one eye should be lost than that the whole man should be lost. So it was here. The Divine Physician, looking at this young man and loving him, and knowing what was in man, saw one spiritual disease—a disease which may be, in the long run, fatal—the love of money—and He proposed an heroic remedy—to renounce all that he has. It might be said of this young man, as of the character in Tennyson's 'Vision of Sin'—

He rode a horse with wings, that would have flown,
But that his heavy rider kept him down.

Although our Lord's words are not intended to be regarded as a literal direction to all Christians, yet certainly they have a meaning and a warning for all Christians. Let us dwell on two thoughts which they suggest.

1. They are the most solemn warning ever uttered as to the perils of possession: 'How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!' Harsh words they sound to us, stern words; yet we dare not explain them away—and after all they are only what the wisest men have always said. 'I cannot,' says Lord Bacon—'I cannot call riches better than the baggage of virtue; the Roman word is better—*impedimenta*; for as the baggage is to an army, so is riches to virtue—it cannot be spared or left behind, yet it hindereth the march; yea, and the care of it sometimes loseth or disturbeth the victory.' 'It hindereth the march.' 'The care of it loseth or disturbeth the victory.' Are not these words true to our own experience? And this is the question which our Lord would have us put often to ourselves, 'What is the effect of my possessions upon my character?'

2. In His words to the young man He tells us one thing very clearly: that one way of escaping from the 'perils of riches' is by being ready to part with them. A voluntary parting with a fair proportion of our possessions, a bestowal of them in charity, is one of the best cures of covetousness, one of the best protections against the 'deceitfulness of riches.'

¶ I remember a case in the City of a merchant who died a few years ago, leaving behind him £20,000. He might have left £200,000, but early in life he had made a resolution that when his savings reached a certain sum—£20,000—he would not increase them; he would bestow all he might have saved in charity. Many people will not consider this a very remarkable action; some will say that they, too, would be generous if they had the protection of a capital sum behind them, but it seemed and seems to me a very remarkable instance of self-restraint on the part of a man who realized very strongly the deceitfulness of riches.[1]

If our almsgiving is to be done seriously and earnestly, it will involve at least two things: some personal trouble in finding out what are the causes—the societies, the institutions in the world which are really working well and doing service to society; and the effort to assign a due proportion of our income to works of charity. If more would only take the trouble to do these things, we should be saved from two great evils—first, the impulsive and emotional flinging away of money in a kind of panic upon the first cause which comes to hand, or the first person who appears with a panacea for social ills. It is lamentable to find how ready people are to respond to a cry got up by some newspaper which lifts its voice in the street and advertises its own humanity, while institutions which for years and tens of years have been quietly doing good are starved for want of funds; and second, it would put to flight, once and for ever, certain questionable methods of raising money, in the name of Christ, which at present prevail. Abolished they could be, if Christian people, instead of waiting to be bothered and badgered, voluntarily assigned a certain fixed portion of their income to the use of Christ and His brethren.

Man is God's image; but a poore man is
Christ's stamp to boot: both images regard.
God reckons for him, counts the favour his:
Write, So much giv'n to God; thou shalt be heard.
Let thy almes go before, and keep heav'ns gate
Open for thee; or both may come too late.[2]

¶ There is a famous picture by one of the greatest of modern artists, very simple and severe: the picture of a dead man in a bare room—a dead man with all the pomp stripped off—and underneath the words are written:

What I saved, I lost,
What I spent, I had,
What I gave, I have.

Following Christ

Luke xviii. 22.—'Follow me.'

1. *Follow.*—Every child has to learn to adjust himself to his environment. We all come into the world profoundly ignorant. In a natural as well as in a spiritual sense we all must be born again. An infant is utterly unconscious of the properties of fire and water, food and poison, frost and gravitation, and a thousand other elements and forces. Knowledge and experience always measure the difference between a child and a man. An American writer has described the consternation caused by the fall of a snowflake in a mining camp. If a child had seen it floating gently and silently from the sky he would have raced it and chased it as he would a butterfly or thistle-down. It would have had no significance for him. But strong men were blanched with fear. They knew that this delicate and fleecy crystal was the harbinger of a storm in which they must fight the terrible forces of Nature with their property, their sustenance, and their life as the stakes. This illustration is universal in its application. Always and everywhere our clothes and our food, our health and our happiness, and our very existence depend upon the ease and the skill with which we discover the laws of our earthly home and adapt ourselves to them.

So it is in the spiritual world. Our salvation ultimately pivots on our interpretation of the laws of the spiritual life and our adjustment and obedience to the personal power in them and behind them. Here, as everywhere, Jesus always practised what He preached. Consistency, like a golden thread, ran through all His words and deeds. From His cradle to His Cross the will of God informed and unfolded and transfigured His life.

That is the spirit that has always actuated all who have followed Christ. Fidelity, obedi-

[1] H. R. Gamble, *The Ten Virgins*, 109.
[2] George Herbert, *The Temple*, 20.

ence, love, have ever been among the signs and the tests of a true disciple. Our worth and our work, the wealth and the poverty of our character, the range and the stimulus and the quality of our influence are inevitably decided and decreed by the intensity of our devotion to Christ.

That was the core of the command to the rich young ruler. Jesus said in so many words to him, as He says to each of us, 'I do not want your great possessions. What I want is yourself, your might, your love, your will, your manhood, your womanhood, all your rich and wonderful personality. Follow Me.'

2. *Me.*—In His parable or analogy of the shepherd Jesus tells us that the sheep will not follow a stranger, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. Here we have suggested to us the reason why so many slight and shun and scorn Christ. They do not know Him. Either by wilful or by blameless ignorance they are strangers to Him and they flee from Him instead of to Him. It is one of the basal laws of navigation that the magnetic needle always points to the north. So, in the realm where He reigns, all hearts turn to Jesus, and vibrate to the emotions and the impulses which His life and His death can alone create and sustain.

There are three aspects of His character and life that specially claim our attention.

(1) *Christ as our Teacher.*—That is the commonest name they gave Him when He was on the earth. 'Rabbi,' said Nicodemus, 'we know that thou art a teacher come from God.' 'Never man spake like this man.' No human feet can scale the Olympian heights where He dwells. As a teacher Christ has no peer. Christ taught the truth and He taught it finally. They said He spoke with authority. It was the authority of the Truth itself. Nothing that we learn of Him has ever after to be unlearned.

¶ You never get to the end of Christ's words. There is something always behind. They pass into proverbs, they pass into laws, they pass into doctrine, they pass into consolation! but they never pass away, and after all the use that is made of them, they are still not exhausted.[1]

¶ Dean Farrar has written: 'Even those who do not accept the Christian faith see in Jesus a unique and sinless personality, one with whom no other human being can even distantly be compared, either in His character, His teaching, or the results which He accomplished by His brief ministry. The most advanced of sceptics do Him homage. Spinoza spoke of Him as the truest symbol of heavenly wisdom. The beauty and grandeur of His life overawed even the flippant soul of Voltaire. "He is," says Strauss, "the highest object we can possibly imagine with respect to religion, the Being without whose presence in the mind, perfect piety is impossible." John Stuart Mill spoke of Him as "a man charged with a special, express, and unique commission from God to lead mankind to truth and virtue." Of the originality of His teaching,' Farrar continues, 'it stands alone in its breadth and in its power, in its absence of narrow exclusiveness and scholastic system and abstract speculation. It was fresh, simple, natural, abounding in illustrations at once the most beautiful and the most intelligible, drawn from all the common sights and sounds of nature, and all the daily incidents and objects of social and domestic life. There is never in them a lurking fallacy nor a superfluous word, but all is intended only to convince and to save.'

Moreover, Christ attached such tremendous importance to our attitude towards His teaching that He declared, 'He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day.' Thus our very destiny hinges on our treatment of the words of Jesus.

(2) *Christ as our Example.*—There are two familiar maxims of conduct that it is almost inevitable should be quoted here. One is that example is better than precept. 'This life of ours,' says Saint Teresa, 'is long uphill, which to pass well through needs the constant presence with us of our great Exemplar, Jesus Christ.' The other maxim is that actions speak louder than words. St Francis was keenly conscious of the truth of these maxims. He once suggested to a disciple that they should go and preach in the city. They passed from street to square, but not a word was spoken. The young man asked when the preacher would begin. The saint replied, 'My son, we have been preaching all the time.' This incident applies with peculiar force to Christ's ministry. There was no interruption in His teaching. He

[1] Dean Stanley.

often was speaking with His lips. He always was speaking with His life. Peter expressly tells us that Christ left us an example that we should follow His steps. Jesus is not 'truth embodied in a tale,' but truth embodied in a life.

¶ Not His teaching as such, not the Sermon on the Mount, but the personality of Jesus has been the saving and illuminating factor in the religion which bears His name. 'Believe in Me,' He says. George Eliot, through all the limitations in which she bound herself, was ever trying to enforce that fundamental truth. Some of her greatest stories are stories of redemption by personal influence, and so she was in a sense paying tribute to the essential principle of the religion which she had dethroned from her mind.[1]

¶ On any students' day in the National Gallery we can find groups of artists clustered around a masterpiece. Their supreme aim is to transfer its lines and its colours to their own canvas. Accuracy is their dominating motive. When as nearly as possible their picture is a reproduction of the original, they have attained their object, they have revealed their genius and their fidelity. The portrait of Christ is painted with masterly strokes and with incomparable colours on every page of the Gospels. Our lives can be pure and lovely and of good report only so far as they have become a copy of His faultless and peerless example.[2]

(3) *Christ our Saviour.*—Here He holds a unique place in our life and our love. He was nailed for our advantage to the bitter Cross. By His sacrifice we live. This knowledge, and the love and devotion which it inspires, have been the master passion of consecrated lives all down the centuries. So it was with Henry Martyn. He intended to be a lawyer, but an appeal from Carey in India changed the whole course of his life. He resolved to be a missionary. When he touched the shores of the distant East he cried, 'Now let me burn for Christ!' and before he was thirty-two he was consumed in the flame of his quenchless zeal. So it must ever be. Here is the only fire that can kindle our torch. Only as we are thrilled and filled with the love that our Redeemer has aroused in us can we, like Him, glorify God on the earth.

[1] W. C. Piggott, *The Imperishable Word*, 29.
[2] W. Wakinshaw, *The Headsprings of Life*, 60.

I had walked life's way with an easy tread,
Had followed where comforts and pleasures led,
Until one day in a quiet place
I met the Master face to face.

With station and rank and wealth for my goal,
Much thought for my body but none for my soul,
I had entered to win in life's big race,
When I met the Master face to face.

I met Him and knew Him and blushed to see
That His eyes, full of sorrow, were fixed on me.
I faltered and fell at His feet that day,
While my castles melted and vanished away,
Melted, and vanished, and in their place
Nought else did I see but the Master's face.

And I cried aloud, 'Oh! make me meet
To follow the steps of Thy wounded feet.'
My thought is now for the souls of men,
I have lost my life to find it again,
Ere since one day in a quiet place
I met the Master face to face.

The Sorrowful Refusal

Luke xviii. 23.—'When he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich.'

One word which rises midway in this verse gives, not to our text alone but also to the whole story, a special fascination. This word is 'sorrowful.'

One of the old Italian painters represents Solomon as rising at the last day, and looking right and left on the parting multitudes before the judgment throne, as though uncertain with which of the two divisions his lot would be forever cast, and it is just this same doubt which is inspired in our minds by that word 'sorrowful.'

The fact that in three of the Gospels the story of this rich young man is told at length plainly shows how much it impressed the disciples, and to this hour that sorrowful look of his continues to haunt the imagination of the world. Three things we may notice about it. It was the sorrow of disappointment; it was the sorrow of discovery; it was the sorrow of disquietude.

1. *It was the sorrow of disappointment.*—Enough is told us about his life up to that hour

for us to recover many of its details. Darwin met for the first time one of his most ardent followers, with whom he had already corresponded at length, with outstretched hands, a bright smile, and these words of welcome: 'How glad I am that you are so young.' The subject of this story has this unspeakable advantage. He was a young man with a career already well defined. What benefits accrue from ancestry and birth he could claim for himself. He had enjoyed all that the schools of that day could do for him, and he had inherited great possessions, with the chances for influencing men which wealth brings with it. Already in the government of his native place, where Church and State were one, he occupied with honour the post of magistrate. All these were conspicuous features in his case, but there is much more and much better to be told yet. He could say, and in no boastful spirit, of the second table in the Decalogue, of the commandments which touch our duty to our fellowmen, and are therefore open to the test of practical daily scrutiny, 'All these have I kept from my youth up.'

And yet, and yet, he was filled with a noble discontent. So when the news spread that Jesus of Nazareth was to pass that way before long, he launched out on a new venture of faith. So in an access of rare and beautiful enthusiasm he came running, and as the crowd separated to let him pass straight to the place where Jesus paused, he fell on his knees before Him with the cry, 'Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' What did Jesus answer? 'One thing thou lackest yet: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor.' Only a moment did it take Jesus to utter His answer, but it was a moment which lost all count of time, and it dashed the young aspirant's hopes, baffled and beaten, to the ground.

2. *It was the sorrow of discovery.*—Perhaps there were few men of his time and land who could claim what he could as regards the moral law, and among them the danger would be that, having attained so much, they would rest content. Yet to the best of men must there not come, then as now, moments of dissatisfaction? 'The law having a shadow of the good things to come . . . can never make perfect.' A shadow is but a shadow, and they who see it in the brightest light see most clearly the outline of that by which it is cast. These commandments which the young man had kept from his youth up had each of them, as Jesus showed in His teaching, its spiritual side, its broader outlook.

What that young ruler claimed—and he did it honestly—was that he had treated the world about him fairly and well. Matthew says that he had great possessions—not money gained in trade, or still less by usury, but that which was the supreme blessing of the Old Testament, land. And at that hour, when the best thought of the Jewish race looked for approaching victory over Rome, and the recovery before long of the country which Jehovah had given to their fathers, it was of consequence, as never before, to hold as a true patriot 'great possessions.' Unconsciously to himself this 'earth hunger' had mastered him.

The claim that Jesus made was intended to lift his glance from the things which were seen and temporal in religion to the things which were unseen and eternal. It put a new and nobler meaning into the keeping of the law, in which he prided himself, and of that new and nobler meaning he had now to acknowledge to himself that hitherto he had known very little.

And more than this. The test which Jesus applied discovered to the young man that, after all, there was something that he loved better than he loved eternal life. He would rather give up life for his wealth than give up his wealth for life. The thing about which this is true in any life is the thing which must peremptorily be surrendered. That it means so much to you affects the matter not at all. What shall a man give in exchange for his life?

¶ Sainte-Beuve tells us that when the Abbess Angélique proposed to the nuns of Port Royal that all private possessions should be surrendered, one old sister showed extreme unwillingness to obey. 'She yielded at last, however, making only one reserve. She gave up everything except a little garden which belonged to herself alone and was her favourite idol. We have all our *little garden*, and we often care for it more than if it were a large one. I might apply to this case the words of Scripture—with a slight alteration. "And the young man went away grieved, for he had a *small* possession." Sister Morel became very angry if another nun or a good Capuchin father remonstrated with her sorrowfully about this unlawful private

property. At last the day came, when, without any monition from outside, by a miracle wrought in her heart, she made the surrender. She sent in a letter the key of her garden, like that of an innermost stronghold. It was indeed the key of her heart.' [1]

3. *It was the sorrow of disquietude.*—He went away. Yet as he goes we feel as though we must not part with him there. There is a gleam of hope in our text. His was the sorrow of disquietude. He was not angry or resentful or scornful, he was grieved. How will that sorrow work? It will work in one of two ways.

(1) Perhaps he will resolutely refuse Jesus. Deep in his heart that sorrow will lie and the dust will gather over it; it will be buried under deeds and bonds and mortgages. Some day, it may be, in turning over the records of his former transactions he may chance to catch a glimpse of that old buried sorrow, and it will strike through him with a sudden chill. He had in those intervening years gained much, but he had lost that, and no breath of eternal life had been wafted to him since.

> Sometimes I think, and thinking
> Makes the heart so sore,
> Just a few steps more
> And there might have dawned for me
> Blue and infinite the sea.

(2) But let us dare to hope that his grieving worked otherwise. By and by, as the years rolled on he took notice of those who had done as he. With whom was he keeping company? Judas went away and sold his Lord for thirty pieces of silver; and so did Herod when he set Jesus at naught; and so did Pilate as he asked 'What is truth?' and dared not wait for an answer; and so did Felix, when to Paul and to his own conscience he said, 'Go thy way for this time'; and so did Demas when, as the Apostle says, 'he forsook me, having loved this present world.' And all the while he would be meeting, bound the other way, with eternal life flashing its foregleams on their faces, the men 'of whom the world was not worthy.' Would not better counsels prevail, and although late, would he not make the great surrender, who earlier in a tragic hour had made the great refusal? The love of Jesus would not then have been lavished in vain.

[1] J. T. Stoddart.

Carlyle speaks of that gift of life 'which a man can have but once, for he waited a whole eternity to be born, and now has a whole eternity waiting to see what he will do when born.'

¶ The *Life of Tennyson* has revealed to us the case of a young man who, convinced that within him stirred the gift of song which God had bidden him use, went on his resolute way, with poverty, hardship, hope deferred, and a hundred forms of self-denial, bravely true to himself and to his call. And in the end he had his reward. The religion of Jesus does demand self-surrender and self-sacrifice.[1]

The Straitness of the Gate

Luke xviii. 25.—'It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.'

The man who stands before the strait gate, awakened in conscience and quickened in will, finds its demand to be a paradox both in word and in experience. The appeals which promise peace and joy in believing, enrichment and freedom in the energies of life, are made more alluring by that promise on the lips of Jesus of rest to the soul. But at the same time he is met with those strange hard sayings, and with that call to a surrender and a renunciation which seem to limit life and empty it of its joy.

That experience has been set in the light of one of the most impressive incidents of the gospel. There came to Jesus a man, young, rich, of good social station, who had kept himself unspotted from the world. He realized that he had not yet attained to the *summum bonum*—the highest good—that eternal life which is the true satisfaction of the soul, and has been the quest of all noble spirits. He had listened to Christ, and his soul had vibrated to the truths Christ taught, and the ideal of life He had drawn. He was prepared to accept a more exacting requirement. But Jesus opened his eyes to the straitness of the gate. 'Sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor.' That searched and exposed the inward state of this man's soul. He hungered and thirsted after righteousness, but his deeper hunger and intenser thirst, his controlling passion, were for

[1] T. H. Pattison, *The South Wind*, 37.

what his wealth and position and authority gave him. He made what Dante called 'the great refusal.' Jesus turned to the disciples with a sigh. 'How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!' Then He added a figure, Oriental in its vivid strength. 'It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.' That is to say, it is impossible.

Let us look at various aspects of this truth.

1. *The rich in worldly possessions.*—Jesus did not condemn the acquisition and possession of riches. He declared riches when honestly gained to be an achievement, and, when unselfishly administered, a stewardship. But He laid His emphasis on their peril. By counsel, by parable, and by keen appeal He entreated men to beware of the perils of wealth. The deceitfulness of riches He declared to be one of the outstanding causes of the choking of the Word. The New Testament echoes the Master's solemn warning. The whole Scripture portrait gallery has no more tragic histories than those of the men who have been apostates and traitors through their covetousness. Riches tend to absorb the inner passion of the soul. They create an assailing horde of temptations. They impose habits and customs which interfere with the soul's life. They make a man feel secure, so that he sits high in pride, and they engender his vanity, while they corrupt his conscience. When riches increase a man sets his heart upon them, and he who began his life tender of heart and generous of hand becomes not only soddened and secularized in spirit, but mean and avaricious in older years. Riches tend to desecrate the soul. Plainly any man who has once seen what riches may create within the soul can also realize why ruthless renunciation of them is the condition of entering the Kingdom. But that to many men makes the gate too strait.

Yet how enriching are this acceptance and surrender and renunciation! In the early centuries Anthony of Coma, in Egypt, a young man of great riches and blameless life, heard this gospel read in church. He rushed forth to denude himself of all his possessions, and to live a lonely and ascetic life in the desert. He may have been mistaken in the mode of his life, and his example was one of the causes of the founding of the monastery and the convent, yet doubtless he entered in at the gate.

¶ After the death of Ion Keith-Falconer, Dr Rainy said of him: 'Very visibly he gave to the cause and kingdom of our Lord Jesus all he had. His university distinction, his oriental learning, his position in society, his means, the bright morning of his married life, I may add his physical vigour—for he had trained body as well as mind—he brought them all to the service. He did so the more impressively because he did it with no fuss about it.'[1]

And Tolstoy, that great Russian reformer, attempted, in his own crude and blundering way, to make the renunciation, and surely he did not fail of his reward. Not every man is called upon to make this sacrifice. But all men must make this renunciation in spirit, and hold themselves and all they have at Christ's disposal.

2. *The rich in natural gifts.*—We know how enriching are those natural gifts with which some are endowed from their birth. The dower of beauty, or of a gracious presence, or of manly upstanding strength, the possession of a voice of compelling charm in speech or in song, the endowment of a personal fascination which wins the hearts of all within its influence, a gift of skill in art or music or literature which wins and holds men's regard—these are no mean riches. Yet how often do we see those who are endowed with them refusing the strait gate. They refuse because they will not surrender themselves, and renounce them.

¶ George Eliot has set this truth in a contrast between two women which makes up the real tragedy of one of her earlier novels. She draws Dinah Morris with her pale face, serious air, simple and restrained manners, as almost devoid of that attractiveness which is the issue of great natural gifts. Her accomplishment of a sober piety, and a power of speech which is a vehicle for rebuke and appeal, form no part of the ordinary riches. But she pictures Hetty Sorel with her bright colour, her glowing eyes, her grace of bearing, her simple charm, as one to whom these things are her cherished possessions. With dramatic power George Eliot describes Hetty at the strait gate, under the appeal of Dinah's moral passion, and she shows her turning from it, refusing to make her renunciation. Her beauty and its power, not her spiritual enrichment, formed the precious jewel of her soul.

[1] *Ion Keith-Falconer of Arabia*, 78.

How splendid is the life which is entered upon when the surrender is made! We have only to think of Santa Teresa, or Sister Dora, with their beauty and charm, or of the grace and fascination of Henry Drummond and of Gordon, as they laid down their gifts at Christ's feet, to see some of God's most nobly endowed entering in at the strait gate.

3. *The rich in intellectual power.*—We are reaching a higher and more difficult surrender. There is no subtler or more stubborn pride than that of the man whose strength of thought, whose power of intellectual apprehension, whose mastery of the problems of human lives amount to genius. Think of the scholar who has attained the first rank in some branch of learning; or the thinker who has analysed and expounded a method of thought; or the poet whose words have quickened men's pulses, and given them power to dream new dreams; or the artist whose insight and interpretation have revealed the truth and beauty and nobility otherwise hidden from us; or the men of leadership in the world's affairs who shape the destinies of the nations. How rich they are! How naturally they stand self-poised, contemptuous of lesser men, finding their secret joy in the very exercise of their wills. Yet how clearly their riches block their way at the strait gate!

What a long roll of men of intellectual power who have refused the gate any one can make! 'Not many wise, not many noble, are called.' We have but to think—to select only a few names—of Gibbon and Hume, of Goethe and Heine, of Mill and Morley, of Huxley and Tyndall, all of whom every Christian man has coveted for Christ, yet none of whom would meet the costly condition of the strait gate. Faith, with its surrender and renunciation, is more difficult for them than for Cowper's cottager at her door. It would be for each of them a much more costly humiliation to renounce the self-willed use of their gifts, than for this rich young man of the Gospels to leave his wealth behind.

¶ Matthew Arnold, with his sensitive spirit, has disclosed its pathos in his 'Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse.' He tells us how he looked into the monastery of the Carthusian monks, with their ignorant faith and ascetic life, and as the memories of his early years came over him he was filled with pathos, because he had found the gate too strait.

> Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
> The other powerless to be born,
> With nowhere yet to rest my head,
> Like these, on earth I wait forlorn.
> Their faith, my tears, the world deride—
> I come to shed them at their side.

How do these enter the gate? A man cannot cast away his mind, or yield it to mere authority. He cannot deny 'the high white star of Truth.' No! But he can accept his intellectual power as a gift to be used for the Kingdom of God.[1]

4. *The rich in self-righteousness.*—This is the deadliest, because the most perilous, of all riches. Jesus won men to leave all, rise up and follow Him, to lay their gifts at His feet, and to use their powers in His service, even though the world thought that they all became poor indeed. But the men who most often foiled Him were those whose riches was their self-righteousness. These men abound in every generation. They are the men who say that the religious life should not make too high a demand.

¶ Spinoza concludes his Ethics with the words, 'All things excellent are as difficult as they are rare.' And a greater than Spinoza does not encourage us to expect ever to see the larger crowd collected round the narrow gate. Ought we to expect it?—could we expect it? asked Dr A. C. Benson by a curious coincidence in a letter written within ten days of his death.[2]

What the surrender and renunciation of the self-righteous rich mean requires no exposition. It has been laid bare in the autobiography of St Paul. There we see its disdainful refusal of the way and the gate of Christ. But there also we see a man hearing Christ's call, and in a complete self-surrender counting all things but loss, and regarding all his past endeavours as the assertion of his pride and self-will. There we see a man giving up his own works of righteousness, and in all meekness and humility yielding himself to Christ as Master and Lord and passing in through the gate.

[1] W. M. Clow, *The Evangel of the Strait Gate*, 88.
[2] W. R. Inge, *The Hulsean Lectures at Cambridge*, 1925-26.

Doing the Impossible

Luke xviii. 27.—'The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.'

THE form which this saying assumes in the Third Gospel encourages an interpretation supported in the other Synoptics. We are not to suppose that our Lord asserts merely the undeniable contrast between the Infinite and the Finite. No one questioned that God was omnipotent and man impotent. But a special inquiry in relation to the subject had been started by the disciples. They had asked: 'Who then can be saved?' It is in regard to the great business of personal salvation that the Master replies: 'The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.'

Since man began to reflect, the wisest have confessed their native weakness. 'Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him?' 'As for man, his days are as grass.' His greatest defect, however, relates to the higher possibilities of his being. Man aspires to the highest happiness, and relies on his own knowledge or intuition to bring him to it; yet his efforts end in failure. 'Professing to be wise they became fools,' one said who knew well the aims and achievements of the Græco-Roman world.

It required the education of ages to make clear to the human mind what was the highest kind of power. At first bodily size and strength was the ready standard of greatness. Experience gradually disclosed the preciousness of forethought, of the knowledge of common things, and of the effect of art. The orator, the statesman, and the military leader had their day; but the virtues of self-restraint, of freedom from common vice, and of devotion to a great interest also became conspicuous. But among one people this great lesson—that goodness was man's highest greatness—was taught from an early period. The great men of the Old Testament differ from those celebrated in other books of history in that they were men of faith. Abraham was 'the friend of God.' Enoch and Noah were just in their generation. Joseph in Egypt, conquering temptation, was greater than any Pharaoh; and Daniel in Babylon, refusing to worship idols, was mightier than Nebuchadnezzar. Neither Pythagoras nor Socrates came so near to God as Elijah or Isaiah. The world knew that man could build pyramids and the Parthenon; that he could use the chisel of Phidias and the pen of Plato; but they began to ask if he could conquer evil, and love truth and virtue for their own sake; and could he lay down his life for his friends?

How fitly do the life and character of Jesus appear at the culmination of the history of Israel, and at the moment, also, when heathen civilization had seen its zenith! He brings to a climax the teaching of the Law and the Prophets, and exhibits in living form the ideal goodness of which philosophers had dreamed. Whatever they may think of the claim of Jesus to be Divine, all allow that He was the best of men. He is the greatest of the sons of men, because He was the purest: 'being tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.' All things were possible to Him, for God was with Him who was 'holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.'

1. Our Lord's first lesson is that our nature has its limits: 'these things are impossible with men.' It is possible to restrain a man from crime; it is impossible to restrain him from sin. We can compel a man to pay his income tax; it is impossible to compel him to be generous. We can readjust man's circumstances; we cannot renew a man's heart. We can educate; we cannot regenerate. We can refurnish a man's mind; we cannot give him the mind of Christ. We can give him courtesy; we cannot endow him with grace. We may give him good manners; we cannot make him a good man. We may save him from worldly excesses; we cannot make him immune from the contagion of the world. We may 'patch up a bad job,' but we have no power of new creation.

2. But 'with God all things are possible.' When God is his helper man is girt about with moral omnipotence. There is nothing then too great for him to attempt or to achieve. He may have riches, yet not trust in them, and may enter the Kingdom of God. The man of low degree may be exalted to place and power without peril to modesty or simplicity. The open-hearted youth may mingle in the turbid rush of the city street, with honour untarnished and with spirit undefiled. But 'no man can do these things except God be with him.'

¶ It is said that when Cromwell rode over the

field where his men were being flung back, his very presence brought such courage and hope, that their souls were renewed to a victorious energy. The very air was palpitating with new possibility, with the sense of mastery and victory. So it is when Christ comes into the field.[1]

3. Let us, then, not despair. Our Lord gives us a solemn warning, and we cannot take it too seriously. We shall not be safe until it becomes part of the philosophy of life. But He also gives us a great promise. 'All things are possible.' Do we say: 'Man cannot be perfect; sin will always cleave to him'? What sin is this that is incurable? Go through the catalogue of spiritual maladies, and say which of these is beyond the skill or power of the Great Physician. Is it pride? Does this attain such complete mastery that Divine grace cannot dethrone it? Covetousness? Jesus emphasizes the dangers of the rich. He knew how the insatiable desire for acquisition invades the most delicate fibres of the spiritual man, and so entangles the secret purposes of the heart that extrication seems impossible. But will not a 'new heart' and 'a right spirit' displace it? We need not make up our minds that others may be strong in faith and pure in heart, and may forgive their enemies, and courageously forsake all for heaven, but that we must be content with our infirmities.

Despair is not a Christian virtue. If we are not to despond for ourselves, neither should we for others. We pray for those who need our sympathy and pity, though sometimes we think our prayer will never find its answer. Some have wandered so far into the wilderness that we do not know if the eye or the hand of the Good Shepherd can reach them. Some have been so torn by the thorns of the jungle—so stained by the mud of the swamp—that we think no art can restore them. Yet for these and for ourselves, when the soul is sick with its woes, and a thousand failures stifle aspiration and paralyse effort, let us remember that in God the impossible becomes possible.

Faith is a grasping of Almighty Power,
The hand of man laid on the arm of God,
The grand and blessèd hour
In which the things impossible to me
Become the possible, O Lord, through Thee.

[1] J. Reid.

Going up to Jerusalem

Luke xviii. 31.—'Behold, we go up to Jerusalem.'

1. Every true life has its Jerusalem, to which it is always going up. At first far-off and dimly seen, laying but slight hold on our purpose and our will, then gradually taking us more and more into its power, compelling our study, directing the current of our thought—so every live man's Jerusalem, his sacred city, calls to him from the hilltop on which it stands. One man's Jerusalem is his profession. Another man's Jerusalem is his fortune. Another man's is his faith, and another's is his character. The man who is going up to no Jerusalem is but the ghost and relic of a man. He has in him no genuine and healthy life.

There never was an exhibition of all this so fine and perfect as that which we see in Jesus. Think how His life gets its glory and beauty from the way in which it is always, from the very first, tending on to the thing which it was at last to reach. That tendency began at His birth, and it never ceased until He laid down His life. He had reached Jerusalem at last. The most intense, persistent purpose that the world has ever seen had reached its completion.

2. Would it not be a vast thing for us if we could be far more aware than we now are of some such great, Christ-like sweep of our lives towards a purpose? A friend comes to you and says, 'Do this with me.' And you quietly reply to him, 'I cannot. I am going up to Jerusalem.' There is an end of it. You have not to sit on a stone at the roadside until you have decided just whether the thing is wrong, and just how wrong it is. Simply the thing is not on your way to Jerusalem, and so you press on and leave it far behind.

And this power of our purpose, this attraction of Jerusalem, is not destroyed, is not weakened—nay, is intensified and strengthened—when the veil is lifted and it is distinctly shown to us that our purpose can be attained only by struggle and self-sacrifice and pain.

¶ A pathetic story is told of the late Bonar Law. He went to France a broken man to visit the place where his son was shot down and killed. They showed him the machine which his son flew, riddled with bullets. Bonar Law

climbed the machine and sat down on the seat, remaining there for a long time, while those who conducted him to the spot waited at a distance. At last he came down, and those who had waited saw a new look on his face, and a new light in his eyes, and a new determination in his walk. He returned to London, once more assumed office, took up his tasks with unflinching zeal, and after a few months passed away amid the grief of the whole English-speaking race.[1]

We hear it said sometimes that it was wonderful that Jesus, having undertaken the world's salvation, did not draw back at the sight of the Cross. Would it not have been more wonderful if, being Jesus, He had drawn back and refused to go up to Jerusalem because of what was waiting for Him there? Can we imagine that? And the same is true of all souls who have really seen their Jerusalem and have set their faces towards it. We do not expect them —they ought not to expect themselves—to be turned back by the difficulties and dangers which stand in the way.

¶ They killed John Williams in Erromanga, but the missionaries went thither again. They murdered them in the New Hebrides, but Christ's heralds went thither again. They butchered Chalmers and Tompkins in New Guinea, but pioneers of the London Missionary Society went thither again. And all these men are in the train of Him who said to His disciples, 'Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are writtten by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished.'[2]

3. What does this mean for us? What is its bearing on our lives? Something very direct and definite. If you are going up to Jerusalem, and as you go you become aware that you can only reach your Jerusalem, your purpose, through suffering—what then? Where shall you look for release, and the solution of your fear? Shall you expect it in the change of circumstances, in the muzzling of the lions, or in the palsying of death? No! you must seek it in the strengthening of your own life, so that it shall be nothing strange for you, being the man you are, to scorn the lions and laugh at death.

If your Jerusalem really is your sacred city, there is certainly a cross in it. What then? Shall you flinch and draw back? Shall you ask for yourself another life? Oh, no! not another life, but another self. Ask to be born again. Ask God to fill you with Himself, and then calmly go up to Jerusalem expecting that all things which are written concerning you will be fulfilled. Disappointment, mortification, misconception, enmity, pain, may come to you, but if they come to you in doing your duty it is all right.

'It cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem,' said Jesus Christ. 'It is dreadful to suffer except in doing duty; to suffer there is glorious'—that is our translation of His words into our own life.

Go from the east to the west, as the sun and the stars direct thee;
Go with the girdle of man, go and encompass the earth;
Not for the gain of the gold, for the getting, the hoarding, the having,
But for the joy of the deed, but for the duty to do.

[1] J. Burns.
[2] J. D. Jones.

The Hidden Saying

Luke xviii. 34.—'And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.'

THE failure of our Lord's most intimate earthly companions to realize what would be the result of His labours has often been remarked by students of the Gospel as a strange and striking chapter in the history of human prejudice. To us who look back on the life of Jesus as told in the New Testament, with full knowledge of its issue and of its fruits, it seems that there is something surprising in the perversity with which the followers of the Galilaean Prophet misread the signs of the times. And as we watch the march of circumstance from the Temptation in the Wilderness to the Betrayal in the Garden, we see—or think we see—how inevitable, as men say, was the fate in store for the young Carpenter of Nazareth who thus set Himself in opposition to the leaders of the Jewish Church and nation.

It is perhaps even more surprising that the Apostles who accepted Jesus as the promised

Messiah of their race, not to speak of the multitudes who hailed Him as the Son of David, did not recall that the Messiah, of whom prophets and psalmists had sung, was One who was to suffer. There was to be a Victor; but He was to conquer through pain. There was to be a victory; but the path to triumph was to be a *via dolorosa*. So much at least is declared in the Old Testament, open to the Jews as to us. Here, so many of them believed, was the long looked for Messiah Himself; and He told them that He must suffer before He should reign. As we find in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah—

> His soul, rejoicing, shall behold
> the purchase of his pain;
> And all the guilty whom he sav'd
> shall bless Messiah's reign.

But this they did not believe; they did not even understand what He meant. The veil was upon their heart, as St Paul says.

Strange perversity, we say; yet it is possible that, if we look a little closer, we shall find it is not so strange after all, but is something which we see often enough among ourselves. Perhaps the Apostles did not see what was coming because they did not want to see it.

1. It does not need much search after illustrations to convince us that most people find a difficulty in realizing what is unpleasant to believe. In some ways it is probably a blessing that most of us see so dimly what time has in store. A nearer vision of the future with all its disappointments might paralyse effort and distract us from present duty. It demands no ordinary faith and courage to face the future when we see it clearly. And most men of action who have achieved anything great have either been unable, or have refused to see, the obstacles which others saw but too plainly. Luther faced what Erasmus feared; for Luther was no prophet, but a sturdy man of action, and thus he failed entirely to see, as Erasmus saw, the dangers in the path of the Reformation. To men such as he prophets may prophesy never so sadly, but the saying is hid from them. They go on their way in sanguine faith. It may be a keener insight which sees the perils of the future; but the man of action is content with seeing less clearly, if so be that he sees what lies directly before him to do. It is only the very greatest of the sons of men who unite this clear vision with the indomitable will that persists in the face of foreseen danger. And the most conspicuous example of all is afforded in the sad and stern words of the Gospel: 'Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all the things that are written by the prophets shall be accomplished unto the Son of man. For he shall be delivered up unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and shamefully entreated, and spit upon: and they shall scourge and kill him.'

This keen insight is, then, a rare gift. Indeed, in men of the commoner sort, dullness of insight into consequence is sometimes attended by the happiest results. It is a natural incapacity which may be a benefit rather than a misfortune to the world at large. But, when it is made an excuse for inaction, when (as so often happens) it is partly deliberate and prompted by indolence, it is indeed a great curse. To gain temporary ease of mind by the refusal to contemplate painful consequence is to live, as men say, in a fool's paradise.

¶ I know a man who is very apprehensive that he needs a surgical operation; but he is afraid to see a surgeon! I know another man whose business affairs have got into a hopelessly complicated tangle; but he is actually afraid to put them into the hands of an actuary! I know a man, whose son is dishonouring his name by carrying on a course of life which is unworthy, who said to me, 'I won't ask him about it; I prefer to be in uncertainty.' Why? That man fears that if he goes to the surgeon, he goes to the operating table; if he takes his affairs to an actuary, he goes to the bankruptcy court; if he faces his son with authority and responsibility, there will be scandal.[1]

The Apostles' failure to understand the words of Christ may then, in part, be explained by that intellectual indolence, half cowardice, half stupidity, of which no doubt they, like other men, had their share. They could not bear to face so terrible a disaster as the death of their Lord, and there are none, we know, so blind as those who do not desire to see.

2. But the root of their failure lies deeper than this. For the prediction of our Lord's death was in each case, when addressed to them,

[1] J. S. Holden.

followed by the promise of His resurrection. This they could not grasp at all, and for an entirely different reason—not from moral weakness, but from genuine lack of insight.

Nothing is plainer in the record of the Gospels than the fact that the resurrection of the Lord was the last thing that His followers expected after the tragedy of the Crucifixion. It was quite beyond the range of their wildest dreams. And the reason is not far to seek. They counted the Christ as something higher, indeed, than ordinary leaders of men; but that He really was what He claimed to be, Son of God as well as Son of Man, they had never fully understood. And so His sayings about His resurrection, even more than those about His death, seemed inscrutable, and without practical bearing.

It is worth asking if the secret of much of the veiled and polite indifference which is apparently felt for the mission of our Lord, even among those who call themselves Christians, who do not refuse the ordinances of religion, is not just this misunderstanding of the claims of Jesus Christ. His teaching is good; He is the world's greatest benefactor—this is profoundly true, men say: but Miracles, Resurrection, Atonement, Sacraments—these are the fond inventions of credulous fanatics or still more credulous priests. What does it all mean, this attitude of mind in respect of Christ and His words? Hostility? Desire to disbelieve? Nay, but it is that we have not perceived who He was, whom He claims to be.

¶ Froude tells an interesting story of Thomas Carlyle, how he heard him in his younger days denouncing the Church because it made a fuss over a mere diphthong, the difference between two Greek words, Homoousios, of one substance, and Homoiousios, of like substance. Here was the Church dividing the world, dividing itself, over a mere diphthong! But the time came when he heard Carlyle say he had made a great mistake; when he saw quite well that if the Arians had won—these are his words—Christianity would have dwindled away to a legend; it would have merged itself in all those surrounding beliefs in demigods which gradually obliterated the distinction between God and man, between the Creator and the creature. So he said, No, we can only treat Him as God if He is really God.[1]

If God, indeed, came among men to restore and to perfect the race that was created at the beginning in His own image, it is not His resurrection but His death that is the real marvel. The wonder is, not that He should now offer us His grace, but that we should ever be able to reject it. And it is neither superstition nor credulity, but sober common sense, to recognize the presence of the supernatural in the words and in the gifts of Him whose ministry on earth was one continuous exhibition of the supernatural. All His sayings are strange and hard to understand, unless we remember who the speaker is. It is because so many of us have a vague idea that the awful title 'God' does not literally and exactly apply to Jesus Christ that we are embarrassed, as the Apostles were, at the extent of the claims which He makes upon our faith and upon our life.

'The Son of man is delivered up into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and when he is killed, after three days he shall rise again. But they understood not the saying, and,' says St Mark, speaking of a like failure of insight to that in the text, 'were afraid to ask him.' So it is, for such sayings are best revealed in self-examination and in prayer. Self-examination, lest there be anything in our lives which we are keeping back even from ourselves. Prayer, lest we forget that He in whose resurrection is our hope is Himself the Answerer of prayer. Thus shall we be enabled to consecrate our own poor lives to service, and the service shall be transfigured by the hope and the promise of the Resurrection.[1]

[1] C. Gore.

The Light of Life

Luke xviii. 41.—'And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight.'

This story is past in time, but it is eternal in truth. Bartimæus is the soul of Humanity struggling for the light. Jesus of Nazareth is the Light of the World—the shining forth of God, who is Light, and in whom is no darkness at all.

1. Blind and begging Bartimæus is a type of humanity in need of light.

(1) Bartimæus lives and moves in a world of his own. He has been blind from his birth, and he becomes accustomed to it. He can succeed with a good spirit in making it a world

[1] J. H. Bernard, *Via Domini*, 62.

still worth living in. Yet his life is clouded by a sense of loss and a haunting uncertainty. The want of sight deprives him of the fullness of life and the freedom of independence.

So is man apart from that sight through which the Light of Life illuminates the soul. The familiar outer world and the life lived within it are indeed real and pleasant enough. The sun sets in a glory of colour. The air is fresh with the breath of spring or fragrant with the breath of summer. There is the kindly light of a friend's eye and the grip of his hand. There is the zest of honest work, and the rest when it is done is sweet. But the spirit of man is apart from these experiences of life. It presses ever for something which they cannot give—for 'the light that never was on sea or land.' It feels after the Great Spirit of whom and through whom and in whom are all things. And here it comes to know its blindness. It has no sure sight of the Great Being Himself; and so all its world is full of a haunting uncertainty. It is apart from the world, but apart from Him it cannot be. Yet He is a God that hideth Himself. What is His innermost mind and character?

Sometimes, indeed, the thought of Him provokes not trouble but mere thankfulness; as when that child of Nature, R. L. Stevenson, cheered his lonely way 'by a colonnade of beeches along the brawling Allan' with the 'triumphal chaunt, . . . "Thank God for the grass and the fir-trees, and the cows and the sheep, and the sunshine and the shadows of the fir-trees!"' But there is the awful 'other side.' When we walk not 'by colonnades of beeches by the brawling Allan,' but by lines of squalid houses in a city street, with far other brawling in the ears; or watch the hope of life crushed by lingering suffering; or hear of thousands slain by earthquake or famine, then the 'triumphal chaunt' seems a mockery: and it becomes a mere 'crying in the night.' What is He? Does He care?

Then, if man turns his thoughts from God and thinks about himself, there comes the same sense of blindness—the same longing for the light. There is, indeed, the simple instinct of life; the joy in it; the capacity of feeling, thinking, being kind, and knowing kindness. But there is, apart from all, the inner story of our life—its shame, its doubts, its aspirations. What is its real meaning: what is to be its ending? We feel that we are blind. And the sense of this want of a clear sight of the why and whence and what and whither of ourselves haunts and disturbs our lives.

(2) And Bartimæus is also a beggar. In so far as he is blind he is not master of himself: he is dependent. His steps are uncertain: there comes a point when he is helpless, and depends upon the guidance or the pity of others. So our spiritual blindness beggars us. The uncertainty it brings robs our lives of sureness and confidence. No man can know himself, know the way he has to go, know how he is to keep to it, until he has reached some satisfying conviction of the meaning of the universe and of his place within it; and without such knowledge there is no mastery of self or of life—no real independence. In the beaten wayside of everyday living the need is perhaps not felt; but when we stumble and fall, or when some blow comes from an unseen Power, then we are baffled and helpless from our want of sight. At such times our friends may help us by their kindness or their consolation, but we long to get beyond the need of sympathy to some personal *sight* which shall reveal to us the way in which we are to recover from our fall, or the way in which we are to take the blow that has struck us down. To see with our own eyes, and by that sight to rise and to trust—this is our importunate desire.

It is then—when man is smitten with the sense of his blindness, when his cry is the cry of the blind beggar—that he may still hear a voice, speaking with the calm authority of perfect possession of the Light of Life. 'What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?'

2. What is the kind of sight for which our spirit cries? Plainly it must be a sight possible to human eyes. There is the light by which, it may be, angels see the purposes of God; there is the awful light in which God Himself beholds all things in time and in eternity. Not by such lights as these could sight come to human eyes. They would dazzle, bewilder, blind with the fullness of light.

> A veil 'twixt us and Thee, dread Lord,
> A veil 'twixt us and Thee,
> Lest we should hear too clear, too clear,
> And unto madness see![1]

[1] Rudyard Kipling, *Many Inventions*.

Yet the sight we ask must be one that sees truth itself, not any mere semblance of truth; reality, not mere appearance. It must therefore be such as human eyes can see, and yet be itself lit by the full truth of God. The first need forbids us to ask for a sight which can see the whole mystery of the universe unravelled and plain as God sees it. Yet the second need forbids us to ask for a sight which shall see something short of absolute truth. Is it not plain, therefore, that we seek a light which, though it does not illumine every mystery, yet is God's own light so far as human eyes can endure it—a light 'sufficient for us in the dark to rise by'?

Such is the light which Jesus gives. He is the light of the world; His gift is the light of life. He was Man—speaking, living as Man, conditioned like us by space and time, He knew what man needed, what man could endure. So there are many mysteries which He did not explain. We could not bear them now—so He said; for the light which is to make them clear we must wait; it will come hereafter. But His light is all-sufficient now.

(1) What does He enable us to see? In His light we see *the truth about the great Spirit of the universe.* He is revealed by Jesus as the God of Love—'Our Father.'

¶ It is said that on a certain occasion when some friends were discussing the features of Sir Walter Scott, one who had known him intimately remarked that the very best engravings did scant justice to the great writer's face, which could wear a most radiant expression. 'In the best prints the lustre is there indeed,' said he, 'but it wants lighting up.' This is a suggestive phrase. In the Old Testament portraiture of the Godhead the lustre was indeed there, but it needed Christ to light it up.[1]

There are heights and depths in the Divine nature which our human eyes cannot discern and could not understand; but there is nothing higher or deeper than His Love. No discovery of other elements in His infinite Being can ever disclose Him as other than 'Our Father.' Nothing—not His Power, not His Holiness, not His Justice—can be apart from His Love. In the joy of human love, of the sunshine, and the sea, and the streams, and the birds, we can rejoice in it; and in the sadness and sorrow of things we can trust it. We can endure as still seeing the love which in them may be invisible. But blindness is gone. We have received our sight. And with sight we receive the mastery of life. Once convinced that God is Love, a man can go straight ahead upon his way. He is master of his falls, for he knows that he can rise. He is master even of the blows that seem to strike him, for they cannot overthrow him. He bows his head in submission; but his spirit rises as he says, 'I believe in the Love of God.'

I know He is, and what He is,
Whose one great purpose is the good
Of all. I rest my soul on His
Immortal Love and Fatherhood;
And trust Him, as His children should.[1]

(2) In the light of Jesus we see also *the truth about ourselves.* He gives us eyes to see the meaning of the story of our inward life—that we should become like Him. His example is God's will for us. If we live for self, for the indulgence of the flesh, if we are gloomy, irritable, uncharitable, conceited, resentful, discontented, we *know* that we are wrong, and wandering from the sure way of life. If we try to become more unselfish, to live for the things of the spirit, to trust more absolutely in everything to the fact of God's love, to let that trust issue in buoyancy, cheerfulness, readiness to forgive; to be willing to sacrifice ourselves for the service of our fellowmen; to do everything with the motive of pleasing God as the best and happiest thing in the world, then we *know* that we are right, that we are keeping to the sure way of life. 'He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.'[2]

[1] M. G. Archibald.

The Faith that Saves

Luke xviii. 42.—'Thy faith hath saved thee.'

THEY say that I shall find Him if I go
Along the dusty highways, or the green
Tracks of the downland shepherds, or between
The swaying corn, or where cool waters flow;
And others say, that speak as if they know,
That daily in the cities, in the mean
Dark streets, amid the crowd He may be seen,
With thieves and harlots wandering to and fro.

[1] Whittier, *Revelation.*
[2] C. G. Lang, *The Miracles of Jesus,* 238.

But I am blind. How shall a blind man dare
Venture along the roaring crowded street,
Or branching roads where I may never hit
The way He has gone? But some day if I sit
Quietly at this corner listening, there
May come this way the slow sound of His feet. [1]

And that is just what happened. Bartimæus could not go to Jesus, but Jesus came to him. One day as he sat at the accustomed begging-place, waiting for the long slow hours to pass away, there came suddenly the sound of many feet and eager folk kept thrusting past him, crowds of them; and it was told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. And with that he was on his feet, shouting and struggling to get at Him, cleaving the air with his piercing and persistent cry, 'Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me.'

What a nuisance Bartimæus must have been to the crowd that day, for they were not only there to see Jesus, they were there to hear what He had to say. As He went forward He would converse from time to time with His disciples, and the crowd would press around Him to catch the pearls of great price that fell from His lips. But here was this blind vagabond, with his shrill and raucous voice, striking in with his loud cries to drown out the Master's tender tones. No wonder they checked him. No wonder they shouted in their rage 'Hold your tongue'; 'Be muzzled.' But notice this. It was just that determination to be heard, that perseverance in pushing himself forward, that stopped Jesus, and which, after the miracle was performed, He praised so heartily. It was the importunity of Bartimæus that saved him, that and what was behind it, namely, the greatness and intensity of his faith.[2]

Let us study the faith of Bartimæus and we shall see the kind of faith that saves.

1. It is a faith *that realizes its true condition.* Bartimæus knows that he is blind. He feels his need of sight. It never occurs to him to suppose that, as regards sight, he is in no worse condition than most of his neighbours. He is not guilty of the folly of thinking that he can act as their guide.

And until a man has that knowledge of himself he is not apt to have saving faith in Christ. It was to those who said 'we see' that Jesus spoke those stern words, 'your sin remaineth.' For those who confess their blindness, and pray for light, He has nothing but mercy. This faith has no temptation to make reservations and 'go halves' with God.

O Saviour, I have nought to plead,
In earth beneath or heaven above,
But just my own exceeding need
And Thy exceeding love.

This is the burden of its song. It has learnt its own weakness too well not to be willing to cast itself all on God.

2. It is a faith *that inquires.* Bartimæus heard the stir that Christ was making among the people. There was a crowd surging along the highway after Him. Hearing the multitudes pass by he asked what it meant. The multitude then, as now, are interested in Jesus. 'The common people heard Him gladly.' When the real Christ appears among the people, they are not indifferent to His claims.

He has made a stir in the world. If we will listen we can hear in history the tramp of the multitude that follow Him. In the literary world His name inspires the best poetry and prose. In the world of commerce He is felt. When Carey went to India, there was not a grammar of the language. When Morrison went to China, he found no helps for the study of the difficult tongue. Missionaries of the Cross were the only ones who would take the time, and give their strength to mastering difficult languages in order that they might convey to the people the message of salvation through Christ.

¶ When Hadyn was old, he attended a concert at which his own masterpiece, 'The Creation,' was sung. It begins with a representation of chaos and darkness, by grating sounds and some discordant notes; then 'Let there be light' bursts upon the audience in a very cyclone of melody. When this point was reached, the old musician, unable to contain his feelings, arose and pointed upward, as if to say, 'That came from God.'

So the masters of music, painting, and architecture may point to Christ as the Author of their highest inspirations. Every battle for the liberation of the oppressed, every institution for the education of the orphan, every movement for the protection of the weak against the

[1] J. D. C. Pellow.
[2] D. C. Mitchell, *The Nonsense of Neutrality*, 98.

strong, mean that Jesus is still in the world rousing the people to noble endeavour. The state of mind which leads one to inquire the reason of this, and to investigate the claims of Christ, is a mark of strength. To sit by the highway of time with stolid indifference to such a world movement is not to one's credit. What Christ is doing in the world to-day should arouse a spirit of inquiry, and make all who are blind to His Deity ask questions, and seek to answer them by searching investigation. The result of such inquiry will be the confirmation of His claims.[1]

3. It is a faith *that perseveres.* The crowd, we are told, rebuked the blind beggar that he should hold his peace. They were quite out of sympathy with him. 'But he cried so much the more.' It is a very strong word which is translated 'cried'—he screamed in eagerness so much the more, 'Thou son of David, have mercy on me.'

The attitude of the crowd is typical of the spirit of the world. The world resents religious earnestness, the importunity of the man who will not be satisfied with words or make-believes, but presses for the real, for the light. Conscience cannot be destroyed: if it is slain, it haunts. And the man in earnest is just this haunting spirit of conscience in bodily shape. There is no surer proof of the failure of the worldly life to give peace than its resentment and discomfort at the appearance of religious earnestness. And for ourselves, there is no surer test of the presence of the worldly spirit than the desire to rebuke men whose earnestness is greater than our own.

There is a subtler form of this inner unreality which needs a special word. It is spiritual jealousy. Let us illustrate from an experience too frequent in many homes. The placid routine of a respectable and in its way religious family is broken by the sudden uprise in one of its members of an intense religious conviction. What is the attitude of the other members? Is it a recognition that the Spirit of God has made His presence plain, that a new call from Him has reached the whole family? Is it not rather too often the mere sense of discomfort, the nervous desire to keep things placid as before, to get rid of the new spirit of earnestness by argument, expostulation, even sneers? The sins of religious people are always the worst; and there are few deadlier than this spiritual jealousy, for is it not a patent instance of the 'sin against the Holy Ghost'?

4. It became a faith *that followed Jesus.* Immediately he had received his sight he followed Jesus. We cannot imagine what a blind man would feel at such a moment, when the whole panorama of nature and human life was set before him suddenly for the first time. It has become familiar to us, and the wonder, romance, and glory of it, have for the most part died away. To him it would be all a new creation—the blessed sunshine, the blue of the sky, the green of the meadows, the tall palm trees, the palaces and walls of Jericho, the crowd of people, the faces of women and children.

But there is the other side also. We must remember that the opening of our eyes never leads to an easy life. Mark tells us, and we can hardly help being struck with the phrase, that he 'followed Jesus in the way.' Let us recollect that He is Himself the new and living way; but also let us recollect that it was the way of the Cross. It was a wonderful experience that experience of the blind man, for the first thing he saw was the Passion. Within a week they were in the midst of the Passion. It was a very unusual experience. Usually God leads men on more slowly, 'I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now'; but to him there came the knowledge of the Cross almost at once.

[1] A. C. Dixon, *Through Night to Morning*, 76.

How Christ wins His Way

Luke xix. 8.—'And Zacchæus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.'

THE story of Zacchæus' conversion is one of the clearest illustrations of the method by which Christ wins men. It is a description of the love of God in action. The method He used throughout had His characteristic touch. It was the method of saving friendship. The great difficulty in saving and helping people is the difficulty of getting alongside. We may have a message we yearn to speak; the problem is to find men in the mood, or bring them into the mood, where they will listen. Christ's way was

the method of a friendship which broke down barriers of resistance and suspicion, and made a way for a love which was at once the messenger and the message. Men can never be brought into the Kingdom by any other power than a persuasive and winsome love, which is God's only way. Oliver Wendell Holmes compares a human heart to a house with two doors—a front door and a side door. 'The front door is on the street. Some keep it always open; some latched; some locked; some bolted—with a chain that will let you peep in, but never get in; and some nail it up so that nothing can pass its threshold. The front door leads into a passage and then into an anteroom. The side door opens at once into the sacred chambers. There is at least one key to this side door.' Christ carried no key to the human heart but the key of loving friendship. His method is the love that knocks and waits and knocks again, enduring slights and rejection with a meek endurance which is love's only weapon to break the hardness of men's hearts. This story is a clear example of how Christ won His way into a man's life through all his defences and brought him into the Kingdom.

There are three stages in this story, three steps in the taking of this fortress of man's soul. Let us look at them one by one.

1. The first was the breach in the outer wall of indifference. Zacchæus was a publican, and that means much. He was a tax-gatherer for the Romans, who occupied the country, and was, so to speak, working for the enemy. Among the Romans the tax-gatherer bought the privilege of gathering. He paid a large sum for the office; and the taxes were his own. Thus the more he gathered, the more he gained. There was great temptation here to extortion and oppression. No doubt, the customs were fixed by law. But there might be many ways of evading the law. The tax-gatherer had much in his power. He knew the law; and those whom he oppressed did not know it. And unless his exactions were altogether ruinous, there was little fear of exposure. If he was moderate, however steady in his extortion, he might carry it on at his pleasure.

But Zacchæus was not comfortable. That was betrayed in his curiosity which sent him climbing a tree to see Christ when He came. For one thing society was against him, and made him feel it. He could feel the very stab of their scornful eyes in his back as he walked along the street. He was not only treated as a social outcast, but as a moral outcast who had forfeited his rights to a place in the kingdom of the faithful; and that rankled in his soul. It hurt him to the quick, and made him more of an outcast than ever. That is what all exclusiveness does.

¶ Mark Rutherford remarks that he would like to add one more to the Beatitudes, 'Blessed are they who give us back our self-respect,' and with good reason surely, for of all gifts theirs is the most healing.

Doubtless Zacchæus was growing outwardly harder all the time, but in his soul there was a craving for fellowship, for being counted as a man. That was what drew him to Jesus. He had heard that Christ was a friendly person whom no artificial barriers of society, nor even the repute of sin, could keep from being friendly. He had heard that Christ ate with publicans and sinners, that He was a companion of outcasts, meeting every one without pride or contempt or any feeling of superiority. The thought struck him that perhaps Christ would be a friend to him. At least it would be good to see the kind of man who was ready to sit at everybody's table and never took any man at his face value or demanded a certificate of respectability. So the first defence—the barrier of indifference—in the soul of Zacchæus was down, and he went out to see Jesus for himself.

2. The second stage was the stage where Christ won His way to the inner citadel and made a conquest. Christ pursued the offensive in a great adventure of friendship. 'Come down, Zacchæus, for to-day I must abide at thy house.' Zacchæus was delighted, and they went home together. What they spoke about we do not know, but all the time the love of God was finding its way into his soul, making tremendous changes. Christ brought him into *His* world; but more, He made him realize that he belonged to it, like an exile whose blood is stirred into strange longing by pictures of home. The closer he came to Christ, the more his real self awoke in him, the more his outlook was changed. His values were altered. Money became nothing to him. All in a flash he saw something which put his wealth into its right

place, made it a trust of God or else a heap of dust. He came to see his extortion for what it was—a sin against God and man, a denial of human brotherhood, an outrage on God's children. All these thoughts began to pass through his mind, as Christ and he sat talking together.

3. But there was still another step. It was the step of Zacchæus' own will. He began to live in Christ's world. He took his place there and began to settle down in it and make such changes as were needed in the life of a man who is living in this new world. 'Lord,' he said, 'the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken aught from any man falsely, I restore him fourfold.' Have we imagination enough to see what that means? The man was putting into effect his new valuation of money. He was looking on it as a trust. He was going to turn it into the coinage of love, making it a channel to others of God's grace.

And he faced up to the light which Christ cast upon his crooked life, looking the past straight in the face and determined to put it right. 'If I have taken aught from any man falsely, I restore him fourfold.' Fourfold was the amount a thief was required to restore if he were convicted of fraud. This man had been convicted by Christ of being a thief, a fraudulent profiteer, and he was going to stand up to it. In his great story *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne tells how a man who had wronged a woman was so torn with shame and a guilty conscience that he went out and stood in the market-place on the platform where adulterers were pilloried—that he might find peace for his soul. Zacchæus was going to do that, not in order to find peace for his soul, but *because* he had found peace for his soul.

¶ We find a story in the *Life of F. W. Crossley*, the Manchester philanthropist, of this quickening of conscience. When he was about eighteen years of age, he was admitted to the engineering works of Sir Robert Stephenson at Newcastle, and began his training as a mechanical engineer. He liked the work, for which he showed great quickness and aptitude, and yet at first he found the change in his manner of life hard to bear. He had to go to his work in all weathers, and to be at his post at 6 a.m., while, when his work was done for the day he had no prospect before him but that of a solitary evening in his lodgings. Sometimes he would occupy his time in his room with the construction of mechanical models; at other times he frequented the theatre. He could not afford to pay for admission, but it happened that a pattern-maker who worked next bench to him at Stephenson's was door-keeper at night at the theatre and did not think it wrong to admit his apprentice free. He went in this way very frequently. Not very long after, when he had become a changed character, his conscience brought up this conduct, and making a calculation of possible fees that he might have paid for admission, he sent the theatre company no less than £60 in compensation.[1]

What was it that had saved him? At first he was only conscious of a real and personal love. And there were two things about it which were clear.

(1) This personal love was seeking him as an individual. Christ had picked him out and marked him down in all his needs; and this love had sought him as he was, and for what he was, not because some one had spoken a good word for him, not because he was rich or in good standing, for this love condemned his illgotten riches, and he had no standing in the eyes of his fellows any more than a lost dog of the streets. Christ had sought him for himself, just because He really loved him as a friend. That was the wonder of it! And that fact lifted him up, gave him a new reverence for his own soul. He felt as a jewel might feel which has been kicked about the dust of the streets and is found at last by its owner and set in its own place in his breast, or like a wandered child for whom no one cares, who has been found by his mother and recognized even in filth and rags, and restored to his home.

¶ Will you not escape to the pity that comes from heaven? For God of His great love still keeps hold of man, just as, when a nestling falls from the nest, the mother bird flutters above, and if perchance a serpent gapes for it,

Flitting around with cries, the mother mourns
for her offspring.

Now God is a Father, and seeks His creature. He provides a remedy for the falling away. He drives off the reptile. He restores the nestling

[1] J. Rendel Harris, *The Life of Francis William Crossley*, 44.

to strength again. And He urges it to fly back to the nest.[1]

The vision of the love of God is the vision that saves us, once we have taken it in. His is a love which is personal to each one of us, seeking us as we are, and just as we are, taking us into His friendship.

He did not wait till I came to Him,
But He took me at my worst.
He needn't ever have died for me,
If I could have loved Him first.

(2) But again: Zacchæus saw that love as suffering for him. He saw that the other people hated Christ for this very act. Jesus defied society in seeking Zacchæus. He had to pass through the fire of men's disapproval, which flamed from their very eyes and would fain have burned Him up. Zacchæus felt their scorn, heard their slanderous whispers. 'Birds of a feather flock together.' He saw that Christ had taken on Himself the scorn of a society which would yet pay Him back with interest and do to Him what it would fain have done to himself. Making a friend of Zacchæus he made Himself 'of no reputation.' It was a love that suffered for the sake of friendship, suffered to fill *his* lonely life with love, suffered to make him an honest man. What a love it was! The more he looked on it, like Christian at the Cross, the more he wondered 'till the springs that were in his head sent the water down his cheeks' in tears of penitence and gratitude. His crooked soul was shot through with a light which showed up every twist and shadow and made him shudder with loathing and shame. From that moment the past was dead, and Zacchæus was a new man living in a new world, which was lovelit and love-mastered from end to end and turned upside down.

That is the vision that saves us, breaking our hearts, and making us hate evil like nothing else on earth. The love which changes men is a wounded love which suffers and will go through anything to save us. That is what God is—suffering Love. There is no other power that can change the world.

Father, if He, the Christ, were Thy Revealer,
Truly the First Begotten of the Lord,
Then must Thou be a Suff'rer and a Healer,
Pierced to the heart by the sorrow of the sword.
Then must it mean, not only that Thy sorrow
Smote Thee that once upon the lonely tree,
But that to-day, to-night, and on the morrow,
Still it will come, O Gallant God, to Thee.[1]

[1] Clement, *Protrepticus.*

When Tennyson was dying, some one asked him if there was anything he wanted. 'Yes,' he answered faintly, 'a new vision of God.' A new vision of God—that is what this world needs—and yet not a new vision, but the recovery of the deep, deep truth of the vision of God in Jesus which we have lost amid the drift of life. What is the true vision of God? It has its heights and its depths—but its central fire is a love which suffers everything, and loves on, and has no power to break down our resistance but the power to suffer and endure.

Are there some who see this love, but fear to step into the great friendship to which it calls us; fear the change, fear the righting of the wrong, perhaps; fear the service to which it calls; fear the new life because of some weakness which like an old wound may find us out and bring us down in shame? A Muhammadan once put the difficulty thus, 'Jesus of Nazareth invites me, but I need the power to live in His world.' It is good if you fear it, for it means that you take it seriously. No man has seen the love of Christ who has not seen its terrible relentlessness toward selfishness and sin. There was no fear in Zacchæus. He was confident that he was going to be able to live in this new world. And why? Because he knew that this Friend was with him. In His presence he felt, as Paul felt, equal to anything, and he knew that in this friendship he had found something which was eternal.

The Moral Stringency of Christ

Luke xix. 8.—'And Zacchæus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.'

ANYONE who wishes to know how Jesus looked to His contemporaries will not turn to deliberate descriptions so much as to chance words spoken when men were off their guard. When His enemies said, 'Behold a gluttonous man

[1] G. A. Studdert-Kennedy.

and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners,' they scarcely expected to be taken quite in earnest; it was enough for their purpose if the slander could discredit His cause even a little. But searching the slander more closely we gather from it the assurance of that brightness and geniality in Jesus which gained a welcome for Him in strange company. When a heathen woman, prompt and witty, said, 'Truth, Lord; but the dogs about the house get scraps, at least,' she meant in the first instance to push her plea and to catch at an advantage given her in talk; but again, without forcing the phrase, we catch in it a glimpse of the bigness and affluence of nature in Jesus which everywhere impressed untutored folk. And in this abrupt announcement, with which Zacchæus breaks the silence, we cannot miss the reminder of the moral stringency of Jesus Christ, the Lord of men.

In their opposite ways Zacchæus and our Lord were both outcasts, and few would have cared to face the world as the host of either. Suspicion was never far from Jesus, and it became acute when He made choice of such a companion. The shoutings for the son of David died away, and they moved on, those two, fellows in the one point of general distrust, with their dusty following trailing after them. And then, without a word of preparation, out of a heart which had been groping for the right thing to say, there broke this: 'The half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation I restore fourfold.' That did not come in answer to some exhortation from Jesus, but from an instinctive sense of what was fitting. Zacchæus had not chosen his companion, but had been chosen by Him, yet at once he recognized the constraint of the new fellowship. 'We know that when we see Him we shall be like Him,' says John; and this man, at his lower level, felt the same—he must be like Him.

¶ If the presence of some good man always moulds for the better one who converses with him, owing to the respect and reverence which he inspires, with much more reason must he, who is always in the uninterrupted presence of God, by means of his knowledge and his life and his thankful spirit, be raised above himself on every occasion, both in regard to his actions and his words and his temper.[1]

[1] Clement, *Stromateis.*

On that story there is much that might be said. The Lord's own comment is that 'the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.' People talk too glibly of salvation, as if they knew what it meant; but in this case we see all the wonder of it, the bringing of a worthless man to goodness, of one who had been detested and who deserved it to a real beauty of character. That is salvation, the birth of a new creature.

¶ That great saint and leader of men, Catherine Booth, says in one of her letters, 'Do not let us be in too big a hurry to get people to say they believe. We will go in more and more for righteousness; I wish we could incorporate the word somehow in the Army's name.' That means, of course, that she, with her unparalleled experience, had found that great word 'salvation' so cheapened as almost to have lost its meaning; and that there was need of making it clear that salvation contains the restoration to goodness.

What first impressed Zacchæus in his new Master was not His immeasurable grace but the clearness of His demand. Joy and wonder have their turn, but on that day righteousness had the first word. There were the gathered wrongs of years to be atoned for, and his mind went straight to that: I cannot be in His company even for a night, he felt, without attempting restitution to those whom I have defrauded.

1. *Jesus' unspoken demand for righteousness.*—Preachers are apt in talking of the mercy of Jesus to forget that there is no mercy in allowing a mean and dishonourable man to go on in meanness; mercy to such a man requires that he should get the chance of escaping dishonour. And certainly that was near the heart of Jesus. There is scarcely any word in His teaching more tremendous than His parable concerning hearing and doing. There were two men, He says, of whom one built his house with a foundation and the other without a foundation, one who took trouble with his life and raised it upon principle and character and self-control, and another who fancied that a flush of emotion and limitless good intentions were enough. Both wanted to build, realizing their need of shelter; but the one wanted a shelter cheap and soon, whilst the other was content to dig and to keep deepening, and so the house stood a monument of faithful effort. It is not effort

which saves a man; but when God comes to you with the offer of His saving help, you must not meet Him simply with an excited sense of something to be done. You must bring to Him all in you that is serious and deep, for, if many have fallen from God who have risen near to Him, it is because they laid hold of Him with their weakness not with their strength. Their answer was a flutter of excitement, a cry of 'Lord, Lord,' not a serious determination of the will, not the settled purpose of obedience.

It may be said that Jesus is not fully known apart from this, for a Lord who saves and yet leaves men careless about evil habits is not the Lord who, in the Garden and on the Cross, had travail and doubt of soul because of sin. For suffering Jesus had a true compassion, but He knew that it could be borne; what was intolerable, because it was daily robbing men of life, was this habit of evil, and against that He daily measured Himself. And a friend, picturing Him in His glory to the men of another generation, spoke of His eyes like a flame of fire, searching, exposing, challenging.

Those awful eyes, they pierce into my soul—
Their light of doom illumines all the world.
Oh! save me, save me, save me from those eyes![1]

It was for that reason that men besought Him to depart out of their coasts. Like their neighbours they loved a sensation, and would naturally have welcomed a teacher of such charm and a companion who brought health and bread in His train; but they shrank in confused dismay from One who, without a word, had the gift of exposing men to themselves, for they did not like to admit that they had no religion of their own. He made them uncomfortable, and so they drove Him from them. Yes, there was in Jesus this element of the inexorable. He forgave sin, but no one ever supposed that He thought slightly of it, or that, even for a moment, He became less absolute in His demands. There is much in the Gospels to confirm the unconscious witness of this man to the clearness of Christ's requirement. If I am to be in His company, I must make up my mind to break with what I have long admitted.

2. *Jesus' way of presenting this demand for righteousness.*—It is clear that He did not preach much in the line of mere moral exhortation, and in this case He does not seem to have pointed out to Zacchæus the course which he ought to pursue. Decisions of that sort He always left to a man himself. The demand was presented in a far more subtle and convincing fashion. Wordsworth speaks of 'truth breathed by cheerfulness,' a phrase which suggests that without a certain joyous wholesomeness of Nature a man never sees things truly and sanely; and it was in silent ways like those that Jesus made His demand felt.

He did not believe in working *legally*, by precept, and admonition, and scolding, but *vitally*, by the expulsive power of a new affection and a new environment. He did not lose Himself in men, coming to their level, thinking their mean and selfish and timorous thoughts; He inclined them to lose themselves in Him, taking colour from their new surroundings, thinking His thoughts, and living in His way.

That is one chief point of difference between Jesus and His forerunner; for John, in his clamorous way, called men to repentance in the world which they knew, where all the hindrances were sorrowfully familiar, and made any lasting change improbable. The motives to which he appealed were powerful, but they were entirely motives of this world, like fear and self-preservation. John was a great moral nature, and by sheer impetus he worked astonishing results with such poor tools; but repentance on the level of this present world is of little worth. So Jesus called men to repentance not in the known world of powers and motives, but in a wonderful, new world which embraces the old as a little part of it. He took a man up into the privilege of His friendship, welcomed him, honoured him, talked to him as if he were fit for something; and the man, looking over the things which had detained and tempted him as from some higher level of life, felt that he had no choice, but must leave the sin or he would lose the fellowship.

Zacchæus had the habit of a lifetime to reform, and before him there lay a work of humiliating restitution; what could bear him through in a task like that? Well, there was the power of this stringent, invigorating companionship which made goodness seem natural, and the friendship was so incredible and so blessed a thing that to maintain it any sacrifice was easy. That is still the way of Christ.

[1] *Mary of Magdala.*

'We know,' says the Apostle, 'that when He shall be made manifest we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.' It is the clear sight of Jesus which makes men good. It is fellowship with that living Person, who is yesterday and to-day and for ever the same, which gives men perfect soundness in their moral nature.

The Sanguine Jesus

Luke xix. 9.—'He also is a son of Abraham.'

THAT is exactly what Christ's critics had forgotten or perhaps never realized. They grumbled that Christ should ever dream of accepting a publican's hospitality. 'He is gone in to lodge,' they said indignantly, 'with a man that is a sinner.' And this is Christ's apology, His defence of His action: 'He also is a son of Abraham.' He saw something in the little man's soul that convinced Him that he belonged to the spiritual family of the father of the faithful.

This judgment of His upon Zacchæus is, in the strictest sense, characteristic. It is a real index to His nature. It is the *sanguine Christ* we see in a sentence like this. He took the hopeful view of human nature, He believed the best of men. He had an unconquerable confidence in them. He had a superb faith in their essential goodness. And it is this superb faith in man's essential and ultimate goodness that qualifies Jesus to be the Saviour of the world. 'We are saved,' Paul says, 'by hope.' And that is true. And the hope that saves is not our own hope, but Christ's hope for us.

There is a great deal in average human nature to depress and discourage and to fill one with disgust and almost with despair. There was a philosopher who said he could believe in humanity *were it not for men.* We all know something of the feeling that prompted that saying. We can idealize human nature in the abstract, we can admire it as a very noble and beautiful thing. But actual living men and women are a very different proposition. We sometimes visit the slum, we see the degraded and brutish lives of those who live in it, and the deadly insensibility and indifference of the people fill us with despair. We read in the newspapers of the follies and extravagances of the rich, of the selfishness of their lives, of their insensate craving for excitement, of their wicked waste of wealth when numbers of their fellow-creatures live on the edge of starvation, and again we are tempted to despair of human nature.

But when the black mood seizes us, the remedy for it is to sit at Christ's feet and learn of Him. In spite of all the tragic failures, lapses, sins and shames of men, we shall feel they are worth working for, because Christ cherished such marvellous hopes about them.

1. Our Lord believed in the *spiritual responsiveness of the average man.* That is to say, He believed that there was something in the human heart, in every human heart, that would respond to God's truth when that truth was declared. The consequence of that faith of His was that He preached to the indiscriminate multitude. Other teachers picked their scholars. Plato insisted that those who entered his school should have some skill in geometry and philosophy. But Jesus made no conditions. He believed that the heart of the ordinary everyday man or woman would respond to the message He had to deliver.

Christianity is not an esoteric doctrine. It is not a religion for a favoured few. 'Go ye into all the world,' He said, 'and preach the gospel to the whole creation.' He had an amazing faith in the spiritual responsiveness of human nature. He believed God's truth was not meant specially and exclusively for the wise and prudent. He believed it could be revealed to and understood by 'babes.' Man in Christ's view of him—not the cultured or specially gifted man, but man *qua* man—is spiritually akin to God, and therefore he can speak God's language and understand God's speech.

2. He believed in the *essential goodness of human nature.* Human nature, in Christ's view of it, was good nature, and He was never afraid of appealing to it. But His optimism was not of that shallow and silly sort that ignores the solemn and bitter facts of life. Says Edward Caird: 'It is a significant fact that no one has ever brought the accusation of being an easy optimist against the greatest optimist the world has ever seen.' Jesus did not play the farce of 'pretending' in which so many people nowadays indulge. He didn't

pretend that pain and death and sin did not exist. He did not mock men by telling them they could get rid of these things by ignoring them. He recognized their reality.

¶ When Marie Antoinette came to Paris as a bride, they did not allow a single ragged or starving person to appear on the streets along which the splendid procession passed. France was seething with discontent at the time, discontent born of dire poverty, a discontent which later broke out into the horrors of the Revolution, but Marie Antoinette was not to know anything about that. So the poor starving populace were swept into the side-streets where they could not be seen, and kept penned up there so that Marie Antoinette might think all was happy and prosperous in Paris. But an optimism based on ignorance is not optimism at all. An optimism gained by a deliberate refusal to face the facts is not optimism but self-deception.[1]

But while Christ thus recognized the reality of sin and its blighting effects on the souls of men, side by side with that there went an incorrigible faith in a sort of abiding and ineffaceable goodness in human nature. There has been a lot of cheap scorn poured on the theological doctrine of 'original sin.' But 'original sin' is a fact of experience. Christ believed in it and recognized it. But the doctrine of 'total depravity,'—that man is altogether evil and that there is no good in him until the seed of a new life is planted in him from above,—Christ would never subscribe to. He was an invincible believer in what we may call *original goodness*.

And to that original goodness He continually appealed; to it He trusted; on it He worked. His very teaching implies all this. He assumes, for instance, the love of parents for their children. He assumes that in the power of that love they will make sacrifices on their children's behalf. He assumes a certain native and imperishable goodness in man that will always respond to Divine and sacrificial love. He believed there was something in the human heart to which the Cross would appeal—some ultimate goodness it would touch and quicken, some sealed fount of tears and penitence and adoring love which it would open. 'I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.' It was Christ's witness to something imperishably Divine in the human soul.

[1] J. D. Jones, *The Greatest of These*, 157.

3. He believed in the *salvability* of every soul. The proof of that is in our text. Zacchæus was one of those of whom the world despaired. But Jesus believed there was the making of a saint in him. 'He also,' He said, 'is a son of Abraham.' That was why Christ became the friend of publicans and sinners.

There are some people whom we are tempted to give up as hopeless—men of perverted natures and broken wills; we call them 'degenerates' and leave them at that. But Christ is sanguine where we are hopeless. The degenerate may become the regenerate. The weak may be made strong enough to withstand in the evil day. Christ dares to hope for an uttermost salvation.

4. And not only did He believe in the salvability of all, but He believed also in the *perfectibility* of all. He believes not simply that He can snatch men from the power of sin, but that He can set them perfect before the throne. 'Be ye perfect' was His exhortation to the crowd, and He believed in the possibility of it.

¶ Over a waste of years I well remember Dr Rainy flinging out a challenge at our communion table. 'Do you believe your faith?' he asked; 'do you believe this I am telling you? Do you believe a day is coming, really coming, when you will stand before the throne of God, and the angels will whisper together and say, "How like Christ he is"? That is not easy to believe. And yet not to believe is blasphemy. For that, not less than that, is what Christ promises.'[1]

Recall what Christ said to the woman charged with the shameful sin of adultery. 'Neither do I condemn thee; from henceforth sin no more.' He had faith that for that poor wretched creature a life of purity was possible. Look at His treatment of Peter. He trusted him after all his failures and denials. He believed that the impulsive, unreliable, unstable man would yet become a rock. Look at His faith in the Twelve! He believed that out of those unlettered fisherfolk He could make apostles, prophets, saints, and martyrs.

It was amazing hopefulness, but the significant thing is that it is abundantly justified by the facts. Around the throne of God in heaven there is a multitude which no man can number, of all nations and kindreds and people and

[1] A. J. Gossip, *From the Edge of the Crowd*, 12.

tongues. They are clothed in white robes—in token of their spotless purity; and they carry palms in their hands—in token of their completed victory.

And we too must have this challenging hope for men if we want to help them. The pessimist never furthers the work of salvation. He only spreads despair. It is the sanguine man alone who can be a saviour. And we have a right to be sanguine. For He who knew men best hoped the most; and His hope has been justified by the most amazing miracles of redemption and regeneration.

The Best Seeker

Luke xix. 10.—'The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.'

In Carlyle's remorseful and tender tribute to his wife we read: 'In childhood she used to be sent to seek when things fell lost; the best seeker of us all, her father would say or look as she thought; for me also she sought everything with such success as I never saw elsewhere.'

1. This is a unique tribute, but when one comes to think there must be many households where one is recognized as the best seeker, and is thereby endeared. The best seeker is not merely the most earnest seeker, but the most successful. What is needed for a good seeker? Mind, for one thing. Carlyle speaks of his wife's sense and wisdom, of her intellect shining luminous in every direction, the highest and the lowest. He pays tribute to her just discernment and her swiftness of decision. It is not easy to draw a sharp line between the mind and the heart. The one acts with the other, and neither by itself suffices. For the true seeker there must be sympathy with the loser. It is this sympathy that gives the key to much that may have happened, and that prompts the continuance of search after long and frequent discouragements.

For the great sovereign quests of life there are needed patience and sacrifice. The two cannot be severed. Where patience passes into sacrifice we cannot tell. As a rule the union is very quickly accomplished, and the track of search very soon becomes the high-road of suffering, and perhaps even the track of blood. Every great seeker knows the days

> Of doubt and cloud and storm, when drowning hope
> Sank all but out of sight.

And often also

> The first discoverer starves—his followers all
> Flower into fortune.

2. The best seeker of all is the Son of man, who came to seek and to save that which was lost. It was for the love of His Father and for the love of souls that He sought us, that He is seeking us still.

¶ One of the most powerful impressions Augustine's *Confessions* leaves on the mind is that even more than he was seeking God, God was seeking him. It is this which gives to the *Confessions*, from one point of view the most subjective of books, so true an objectivity. At almost every stage in the narrative he pauses to emphasize this. Even in the 'Hound of Heaven' the unwearied search of God is not set forth more hauntingly than in the *Confessions*. Ever and anon we hear 'those strong feet that followed, followed after.'

> With unhurrying chase
> And unperturbèd pace,
> Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
> They beat—and a voice beat
> More instant than the feet,
> 'All things betray thee who betrayest me.'

As early as the second book, where Augustine is dealing with his sixteenth year, he writes, 'For Thou wert ever with me mercifully rigorous, and besprinkling with most bitter alloy all my unlawful pleasures,' and the same thought is repeated in the later books: 'Thou sentest Thine hand from above, and drewest my soul out of that profound darkness'; 'I was tossed about with every wind, but yet was steered by Thee, though very secretly'; 'These things I thought on, and Thou wert with me; I wavered, and Thou didst guide me; I wandered through the broad way of the world, and Thou didst not forsake me'; 'And Thou, O Lord, pressedst upon me in my inward parts by a severe mercy, redoubling the lashes of fear and shame.'

So often we seem to wander into safety, only afterwards to see that an unseen hand was

drawing us on. We seem to be blown by a chance wind into the haven, only afterwards to discover that the good providence of God had been filling our sails all the time. We seek, but even before we start our seeking, God has been seeking us.[1]

Many a time it is in strange places that He comes upon His own. One tells of her finding in an artless story. Her heart had been touched but not melted, till one day in the garden she saw an apple tree in blossom, and as she stood under it she was flooded with the thought of the love of God. Another heart, also stirred by desire, resolved at last that she would read her Bible straight through till she found her Saviour. At last she came upon the words, 'I am the Way,' and there her wanderings ended. She had been found. A saint tells how the Shepherd found her in an Andalusian convent, where the fountain was the only moving, sounding thing in the dead noonday silence, when there was not a breath to stir the lemon tree or pomegranate bush. A preacher, well known in his day, was found when listening to an old melodrama that ended with a sailor's drinking a glass of gin before he was hanged, and saying for his last words, 'Here's to the prosperity of the British nation and the salvation of my immortal soul.' Down went the curtain, and down went the man, for he ran home with all his might. He had been struck to the quick by the words, 'The salvation of my immortal soul,' and in his chamber Christ found him.

3. The best minister is the best seeker—not the most eloquent preacher, not the profoundest scholar or thinker, not the conspicuous leader of men, but the humble, patient, resolute, prayerful seeker of souls. He learns very soon the tides and counter-tides of temptation and impulse that retard his work. He is quickly made aware how little his hold is upon others, of how little he can accomplish by mere power and charm, of the stubborn resistance of those he is fain to win. In the gloom of such discoveries the temptation is to become listless, dark, and dead. But he may be a good seeker for all that. If he is he will refuse to be discouraged, and rebuffed, and put aside, and baulked of his aim.

We are to go on seeking with love as indefatigable as the Saviour's own. We have done our part in this poor life if at the end we are still seeking souls, if we have sought them in spite of infirmity and temptation and disappointment, for we shall know at the end what Christ has known all through, that to find a soul is to find a pearl of great price.

So this life of seeking, which seems often in hours of depression so aimless, so unsuccessful, such a complete failure in short, changes to a glory. While it has passed it has often seemed sad enough—a life where the hour's love is succeeded by the day's coldness, where the other law is striving against the law we fain would keep, where the clouds return after the rain, where the glow of the beginning soon fades away, where all we have done is to pour in oil and wine as we could. But some day we shall perceive that it was good, that it has brought us into eternal union with the Heart that was pierced but that beats for ever, and that 'if the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth in Christ.'

[1] R. N. Flew, in *Eleven Christians*, 32.

That Which Was Lost

Luke xix. 10.—'The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.'

1. What did Jesus mean when He spoke of 'that which is lost'? It is one of the most haunting and piteous of His phrases, and it is against that sombre background that the gleam of the gospel is revealed. We shall probably never understand the ecstasy that thrills the New Testament until we discover it rising out of the tragic music of such words. What do they mean?

The poets, none, perhaps, more than Wordsworth, have done something to express at least the sense of loss. Once 'meadow, grove, and stream' were 'apparelled in celestial light,' but now—

> The things which I have seen I now can see no more.
> The Rainbow comes and goes,
> And lovely is the Rose,
> The Moon doth with delight
> Look round her when the heavens are bare,
> Waters on a starry night
> Are beautiful and fair;

The sunshine is a glorious birth;
But yet I know, where'er I go,
That there hath past away a glory from the earth.

Is this experience but the arrival of a riper wisdom, nothing worse than the disillusionment that follows, when a shadow passes from the face of reality? Alas, there is no room for doubt that, with the first act of conscious and responsible sin, some beauty of innocence, some gracious peace, leave us and seem for ever irrecoverable! All honest human life suffers from a certain spiritual malaise, the bitter, nagging, weary sense of a world of possibilities missed, a world that might have been inherited by a pure conscience and a clean heart. This is more than the passing of a glamour.

But how much more and how shall we explore it? There is no way of approach save by following the mind of Jesus. And the best clue to His mind is found by watching Him in the moments when He comes under stress of emotion. We are sometines told how He felt or looked. At other times, we have to judge from the communicated thrill of His tone. Sometimes we overhear revealing words. On occasion we are almost conscious of His beating heart. By studying such moments we may find ourselves looking into the depths, and may come back with the harvest of a great sea. Let us consider, therefore, one or two such moments in the experience of our Lord.

(1) On one occasion the veil is lifted with startling swiftness, and we are told that 'Jesus wept.' This stress of feeling came on Him, in presence of death and of the interruption and dismay death involves. They were tears of sympathy, doubtless. He mourned with the sorrowing sisters. But had the tears no sense of loss in them? Are they not the measure of the value He put on human life? He was serene in His own thought of death; He transformed its meaning. But He hated it none the less; at least He hated disease that led to it, and was prepared to fight disease to the last. Life was to Him a noble, wonderful, gracious thing. Life's burden and eclipse, and all that meant for others, bowed Him down, and one great element in His sympathy arose from the fact that He apprehended with those mourning people around Him how tragic the loss of faith in life can be.

(2) The next example is that incident in which the evangelic writer achieves his most delicate, restrained, pathetic triumph—the story of the woman taken in sin. Surrounded by her brutal accusers, she is brought into the presence of Jesus. Why did they not pillory the man who had fallen? And in her presence Jesus is preoccupied writing with His staff upon the ground. This is the delicacy of a pure soul, who will not look upon her with the cold stare of the consciously righteous, who has no contempt to offer—only a nameless pity and sorrow. And His deep-breathing soul was under stress, before one of life's most pitiful tragedies—the loss of purity, the coarsening of a human soul.

If the bitter accusers of this poor woman failed in justice as in charity, He Himself restored the balance. For the great drama of human loss He has left us is the drama of a man's ruin, when he went into a far country and wasted his substance in riotous living. No parable cost Jesus so much in the unfolding. There is not a word of it which is not tense with feeling. The fugitive glimpses of home, the figure of the father, the awful dereliction of the wastrel, his abject, lonely misery—was there ever such a picture of loss? It means loss of home and self-respect, loss of moral decency and the power of self-recovery, loss even of moral sanity, loss of everything except the Love that follows over the storm-swept distances and some spark left within the derelict that can respond.

(3) There is a passage in Luke xi. which reveals Christ's sense of human loss by the heat of His denunciation. It is a terrible passage in judgment of hypocrisy. Here are people of official standing, who profess religion and have lost all sense of justice, who are rigorous in observance and miss the simplicities of faith. They profess regard for righteousness and have lost sincerity. They profess veneration for antiquity by building the tombs of the prophets; but they, like their fathers, have lost the spirit of prophecy, and call evil good and good evil. We may judge by the passion of these scorching words something of His sense of the bitter and irremediable loss involved in such apostasy.

(4) Finally, we cannot forget the lamentation on the brow of Olivet. 'Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I . . . and ye would not!' This is sorrow over national

degeneracy and the loss which comes from disobedience of God. He sees a shepherdless people stripped of all authority, as of all authentic guidance, because they have lost understanding of their God and His purposes. With the burden of this loss weighing on His spirit, He takes His way to be crucified.

Now these illustrations give us some aspects at least of human loss, loss of a radiant faith in life, loss of purity of heart, loss of moral reality, loss of understanding of the will of God. And it is evident, by His emotion, that every such loss to Jesus was sheer agony of soul.

Cloak it as we may, sin is a ghastly reality. Nothing ages men like sin. Nothing in life casts so dark a shadow, nothing leaves so deep and virulent a sting in life or death, as a sin too dearly loved, an ideal too lightly abandoned, or a faith flung away in some moment of vulgar and petulant selfishness. We grow callous to the great sin-stricken world, we become easily indifferent to our own imperfections. And it is perfectly clear that we can only retain the sensitive heart as we retain our sympathy with the sensitive mind of Jesus. With His eyes only can we look into the abyss.

2. But our quest is not over till we have filled in the content of the word 'save.'

He didn't come to judge the world, He didn't come to blame,
He didn't only come to seek; it was to save He came;
And when we call Him Saviour, then we call Him by His name.[1]

It is clear that Jesus found what He sought for—that which was lost. The question is, Does He, or can He, recover it? Experience proves He can. Let a man but place himself in sympathetic relation to Christ, honestly testing Christ's authority, testing His central and final relation with God, testing His personal understanding of human need, and His command of redemptive energy—let a man but do that humbly, and he will come to feel that Power goes forth from this Son of man, especially from His sacrificial spirit, as from no one else.

¶ Long ago (the memory comes back across the years) I chanced to see a vision of great natural beauty in a patch of cloud. It was in the morning sky, but long after the sun was up, and the colours of the sunrise had dispersed. Yet this patch of cloud was irridescent with rainbow glory. Wise people told us afterwards that the fumes of many a furnace, the deadly gases given off in wastage from a score of roaring factories, the lost products of mill and foundry, had gone to the making of the vision. The alchemy of sun and ether wrought this wonderful web of many colours, and laid it lightly like a garment on a common cloud, until, indeed, the cloud seemed 'apparelled with celestial light.' So is every one that is born of the Spirit.[1]

Such is the power of Christ's redemptive touch. That which was lost He has found. And He saves it from the bitter and irrevocable years; saves it from its grossness as from its futility; saves it from its impurity and shame. At His touch it becomes a new creation, the broken reflection but the sure prophecy of a stainless life.

[1] Dora Greenwell.

Lost Property

Luke xix. 10.—'The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.'

'To seek and to save!' Quest and conquest! 'To seek'; the long, long, tireless pursuit! 'To save'; the restoration, the convalescence, the perfect health! And all this about a man named Zacchæus, who was regarded as self-exiled from the pale of spiritual privilege, who was 'out in the cold,' and who lived in the freezing isolation of social contempt. 'The Son of man is come to seek' . . . Zacchæus! In what subtle and delicate ways he had been seeking His man we are not told. The 'seeking' may have been going on for many days; perhaps by friendly nods and recognitions, or in a thousand other ways open to the Lord of life and light. But now Zacchæus is found, and the joy of salvation is begun.

But let us look at the words of our Lord from another point of view. 'That which is lost.' Any precious thing which is lost He came 'to seek and to save.' There are lost pieces of silver as well as lost children, and it is in the grace of our Lord to restore them. Even Zacchæus himself, who has been found by His

[1] A. Connell, *The Endless Quest*, 86.

Redeemer, may lose many a precious piece of silver, and it is in the Lord that the lost piece must be recovered. Let us look about in our common sphere for suggestions of common losses which mar and impoverish the Christian life.

1. *Lost Ideals.*—'The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost.' He is come to recover lost ideals. Now, what is an ideal? Interpreted literally, the word signifies something seen. It is something seen in idea, before it has been realized in practice. It is the architect's plan, before the labourer has put a spade to the soil. It is the finished pile seen in vision, a vision which is to determine the laying of every brick and stone. The ideal which I hold of myself is just a vision of myself perfected. I see myself as I might be, I see myself in the finished state. That idea is my ideal, and it has a tremendous influence in my life.

Now two things may happen to an early ideal. On the one hand, we may cheapen it. Anybody who has been concerned with the erection of a great building will know how frequently the building committee meet around the plans and discuss how they may be cheapened. 'Cannot we leave out this bit of tracery? Is not that piece of decoration needless? Could we not level this tower and just leave it plain?' And so the endeavour is to cheapen the architect's idea, and there are faithful members of the committee who continually resist the inclination. And so it is with our early ideals of life; they are radiant and beautiful, but, as the years pass away, we are inclined to cheapen them, and to make them less exacting, to render them more easily attainable, to denude them of the beautiful, and to reduce them to the commonplace. We hold before our life a lame thing, an imperfect thing, which is not well-pleasing to the Lord. Or, in the second place, our eyes may become so dim that we cease to see the ideal. There is nothing about which the Scriptures are more clear than the insidious peril of a man becoming blinded by the world. His eyes become sealed, and the ideal becomes as though it did not exist. The ideal is lost!

¶ We believed once in the victory of truth; but we do not now. We believed in our fellowmen; we do not now. We believed in goodness; we do not now. We were zealous for justice; but we are not so now. We trusted in the power of kindness and peaceableness; we do not now. We were capable of enthusiasm; but we are not so now. To get through the shoals and storms of life more easily we have lightened our craft, throwing overboard what we thought could be spared. But it was really our stock of food and drink of which we deprived ourselves; our craft is now easier to manage, but we ourselves are in a decline.

I listened, in my youth, to conversations between grown-up people through which there breathed a tone of sorrowful regret which oppressed the heart. The speakers looked back at the idealism and capacity for enthusiasm of their youth as something precious to which they ought to have held fast, and yet at the same time they regarded it as almost a law of nature that no one should be able to do so. This woke in me a dread of having ever, even once, to look back on my own past with such a feeling; I resolved never to let myself become subject to this tragic domination of mere reason, and what I thus vowed in almost boyish defiance I have tried to carry out.[1]

Now 'the Son of man is come to seek and to save' that lost ideal. It is in closer communion with Him that its glory will be recovered. 'The eyes of them that see shall not be dim.' In the inspiring company of the Lord we come to have the mind of Christ, and our eyes 'shall see the King in His beauty.' Our lost property shall be recovered.

2. *Lost Enthusiasm.*—We all know the man. There are hundreds of them in the common road. It is the man who began an enterprise with a tremendous passion which laughed at impossibilities, and reduced all obstacles to small dust. His enthusiasm made him like a motor, with fine horse power, which could take the hills as smoothly and easily as the level plain. He was 'a burning and a shining light'; he had both light and heat, passion and discretion, and he was a great minister in the Kingdom of our Lord.

But the passion began to abate. 'Ye did run well! What did hinder you?' The man began to 'cool off.' It is not that he has given up work altogether, but that it is done grudg-

[1] A. Schweitzer, *Memoirs of Childhood and Youth*, 98.

ingly and with creeping reluctance. Progress has become almost stagnancy.

¶ In Collier the inner fires never seemed to die down. He had the 'calmly fervent zeal,' the 'even strong desire' of which Wesley sings. Some sputterings of the holy fire there are in us all; in him it burned through all the years with a fixed and steady glow. 'Jackson,' he said to me one day in a characteristic outburst, 'the trouble with so many of our fellows is that they so soon lose their "fizz."' But Collier never lost his 'fizz'; he never knew the 'uncourageous elder years' which come to so many who begin life with high and generous hopes.[1]

O! worst of punishments, that brings
A blunting of all finer sense,
A loss of feelings keen, intense,
And dulls us to the higher things.[2]

'The Son of man is come to seek and to save' lost enthusiasms. He will take fire from His own altar, and transfer it to 'these cold hearts of ours.' He will bring His own passion to our indifference, His own fervour to our coldness. In Christ our lost enthusiasm can be regained. The fire can be rekindled, and again we can burn for God and man.

3. *Lost Hope.*—Yes, that is a frequent loss in life! Men who lose hope about themselves may become despondent because of their own spiritual stagnancy, or the creeping slowness of their growth. They appear to be no bigger in stature than when they first enlisted among the disciples of the Lord. Or they are despondent because of the apparent futility of their Christian work. Or perhaps it is a mother despairing about her boy, and almost giving up the battle for his redemption. Or again, perhaps it is a social reformer who is beginning to think that the odds are too many, and he is inclined to bury his ideal in a lumber room, and to take life more easily, and give more assiduous attention to himself. All these are types of men and women who have lost their hope, and who, therefore, lack the great dynamic in Christian service.

'The Son of man is come to seek and to save' lost hope. It is in our close communion with the Saviour that our hope will be reborn. 'The God of hope fill you with hope.' The only remedy for despondency is closer intimacy with the Christ. Let the Lord talk to you about His own love and patience, and long-suffering, and His own hopes for you, and His own steadfast purpose to bring you at last to His own likeness! Let Him tell you of His pangs and sorrows about your boy, and about your scholar, and about your social enterprise. And while He talks to you your hope will begin to re-emerge out of the earthborn mist, and fleetness will come again unto your feet. Your lost property will come back again! 'We have good hope through grace.'

4. *Lost Spiritual Joy.*—'Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.' But we need not go back to the Psalms for this cry for a lost estate. Here is a cry nearer to our own time:

Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?

The early joy has become stale. The early delight has become a sunless exercise. And mark the peril of it; for 'the joy of the Lord is our strength,' and if our joy is impoverished our strength will be reduced. So here is a valuable bit of lost property! Thousands of people have lost the joy which was theirs when first they were converted unto God.

'The Son of man is come to seek and to save' lost spiritual joy. The New Testament is full of words which begin with the suggestive syllable 're,' and every one of the words is significant of something being made over again, or being re-established in its original place. Restore! Renew! Recreate! Reconcile! Our Lord delights in this ministry of bringing things back, and of resetting them as in the mind of God. And so it is with lost joy; we can have it back again if we seek a closer fellowship with Christ. We shall discover our lost joy in Him. 'My joy shall be in you,' and the early experiences will crowd again to our gates.

¶ There is a wonderful allegory by Nathaniel Hawthorne called 'The Intelligence Office.' Everybody who has lost anything makes enquiry at its door. A woman in her wedded life comes to ask about the lost affections of her courtship! An old man comes in quest of the lost and wasted hours of his youth! And so

[1] G. Jackson, *Collier of Manchester*, 96.
[2] Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

on. There is another office, in which the Lord of Glory sits. If we have lost anything of infinite value it is well for us to enquire at His door. He knows all about it, and He can tell us where and how to find it. There is no lost property office like the dwelling-place of the Saviour. 'Seek and ye shall find.' [1]

Into a Far Country

Luke xix. 12.—'A certain nobleman went into a far country.'

'INTO a far country'—how is it the words are so familiar, and sing themselves in the mind like the fragment of a song? It is because the phrase occurs not only, as we know, in the parable of the Prodigal Son, but in other parables as well—in the Talents, in the Pounds, and in each of the three versions of the Wicked Husbandmen. In certain other parables also, while the exact words 'into a far country' do not occur, there is the same idea somewhat differently conveyed. Now a phrase that occurs so often must be one of the bricks with which Jesus built up His parables, one of the abiding forms of His imagination. It is but an artist's device, a feature in His stories, but yet, if it recurs again and again, it must in some measure suggest His way of looking at things, and might, if studied more closely, yield us a hint or two as to His view of life and of the world. Beneath the garment woven by the fancy to fit it there will be some spiritual truth, half-concealed, perhaps, yet also half-revealed.

1. First of all, the phrase occurs in the kindred parables of the Talents and the Pounds. 'The kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country;' 'A certain nobleman went into a far country.' In either story a master, before going 'into a far country,' calls his servants and gives them money to trade with, and then 'after a long time' returns and reckons with them and rewards them according to their diligence.

By that phrase 'into a far country,' what truth is it Jesus suggests or hints at? It is just that which Browning puts so strikingly in 'Christmas Eve,' where he says that God, after creating man:

> Stands away
> As it were a handbreadth off, to give
> Room for the newly-made to live,
> And look at him from a place apart,
> And use his gifts of brain and heart.

It is God who has made us, and He too preserves us in being, so that, were He to withdraw Himself wholly from us, we should forthwith cease to be. All we have also—gifts, talents, lot, opportunity—is of His giving. Apart from Him we have nothing, are nothing. And yet, while thus dependent, we are granted also a certain and not unreal independence. God stands, as it were, away from us a handbreadth, leaving us to walk on our own feet, allowing us freedom of choice and action.

> For He that worketh high and wise
> Nor pauseth in His plan,
> Will take the sun out of the skies
> Ere freedom out of man.[1]

He gives us powers and sets us tasks, and then, as it were, He moves away from us—not in unkindness but in wisdom—so that we may be on our own, and, putting ourselves into action, may attain to skill and knowledge and virtue. A wise teacher does not do the child's sum for him; he goes away and leaves him, for a while at least, to work it out for himself. It is told of an English king that, urged to send help to his son, who was hard pressed in the hottest of the fight, he refused, saying, 'Let the boy win his spurs!' And even so does God deal with men. He does not stand so close as to dominate us. He does not do everything for us. He moves off and gives us room and liberty. And that is the deep truth which Jesus suggests when in His parables He makes the master of the house go off on a journey 'into a far country.'

2. In the second place, this phrase occurs in each of the three versions of the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen: 'A certain man planted a vineyard, and let it forth to husbandmen, and went into a far country for a long time' (Luke xx. 9). In what follows the allegory is transparent. It is Jesus' philosophy or epitome of Jewish history.

But the point for us meantime is a minor one: Why in His story does Jesus make the owner of the vineyard, who plainly stands for God, go

[1] J. H. Jowett, in *The British Congregationalist.*

[1] Emerson.

off 'into a far country'? Why should he not live near his property, so as to watch it; and, when he wants fruit, why does he not come and ask for it himself? We feel of course that Jesus is right, and the reason is not far to seek. 'And went into a far country'—by that one touch Jesus gives His picture the true perspective, and keeps it true to the conditions under which human life is lived.

We wonder at times why God should hide Himself thus, never permitting us even a glimpse of His face; and yet, on second thoughts, we begin to guess at His reasons and find that here also God's way is best. If all truth lay at our feet, we should not value it, nor should we have the interest and discipline that belong to searching for it. If God did not hide Himself, that search and aspiration after Him which is the noblest of human tasks would have been denied us. Just as, when we teach a child to walk, we go a little way off and entice him to come to us, so God goes 'into a far country,' and bids us come to Him, and in the effort of climbing and aspiring to Him we attain to the things that make us men—faith and character.

¶ 'I am nothing,' says Watts, one of the greatest painters and one of the noblest men of the nineteenth century, 'but I aspire. The only thing I possess, and I never remember the time I was without it, is an aim towards the highest, the best, and a burning desire to reach it.' So he took as the watchword of his life the motto, 'The Utmost for the Highest.' In his great piece of sculpture of a horse and its youthful rider, entitled 'Physical Energy,' at which he was engaged when he died, he continually altered the head of the youth, ever throwing it farther back and back, so that at the end the face looked not earthward but heavenward. This ever-increasing upward look was the history of his own life.[1]

3. In the third place, there are other parables in which, though the exact words 'into a far country' are lacking, there is the same idea somewhat differently expressed. Thus in Mark xiii. 34 we read: 'For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.' In Matthew and in Luke there are like passages, in which the story is of a householder who, going from home, was so long absent that the servant left in charge was tempted to neglect his duty, saying, 'My lord delayeth his coming.' So also in the parable of the Ten Virgins we read that 'the bridegroom tarried.' These phrases all occur in parables dealing with Jesus' return or second advent, and, whether by greatness of distance or by length of time or absence, what they all imply is that between His comings there was to be an interval—an interval of some duration, an interval at least long enough to test the faith and faithfulness of His waiting servants.

Is it not, then, rather strange that the first Christians overlooked a hint so often and so plainly given, and went off on the notion that Christ was to return almost at once? It may be they were blinded by the very eagerness of their faith. Their horizon, too, was narrow, and their outlook parochial. All they thought of was the saving into God's Kingdom of themselves and a few more of their own generation; they never dreamt of a gospel that was to be carried to the ends of the earth, and a Church that was to grow from more to more throughout the ages. But here also, as elsewhere, Jesus was right and His disciples were wrong.

Centuries have passed, and still Christ tarries. Truly it is 'into a far country' He has gone. Looking back on the long stretch of history behind us, we seem able to trace a steady progress and increasing purpose, and we argue that God would not interfere to break off suddenly so grand a work, but will rather carry it forward slowly and surely to perfection. Yet we, too, may be wrong with our idea of slow, unbroken progress, just as the first Christians were wrong with their idea of sudden, catastrophic consummation. For, after all, the final end in view is not the reaching of a perfect state of society but the making of souls. And if that be so, the probation might, with perfect fairness, be brought to an end at any time. In respect of the individual, indeed, what for him is the end may come any day. Hence the great thing is to watch and to be ready; we are so to live day after day that, whenever He should come, we shall not be surprised in that which is unworthy.

¶ The watchfulness which Jesus Christ commands, is a faithful care to love always and to fulfil the will of God at the present moment, according to the indications we have of it:

[1] J. Burns.

it does not consist in worrying ourselves, in putting ourselves to torture, and in being ceaselessly occupied with ourselves; but rather in lifting our eyes to God, from whence comes our only help against ourselves.[1]

4. There remains the phrase as it meets us in the parable of the Prodigal Son. 'The younger son,' we read, 'took his journey into a far country' (Luke xv. 13). And here the surroundings of the phrase and its suggestions are altogether different. In the other parables the suggestion is of God moving away from man; and when He so moves, it is in wisdom and from kindness, and in appearance rather than in reality. But here the suggestion is of man moving away from God; and when he so moves, it is in waywardness and folly, and also the separation is real because it is moral—a separation in will and heart. Sin, indeed, is the only thing that really separates between man and God.

Yet even from the far country there is a way of return. Only let a man repent and turn again towards his God, and at once the barriers lift, the distance is wiped out; and once more God is near. Only let him arise and go to his Father, and already his Father is on the way to meet him. 'When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.' God does not leave us to cover the whole distance our sin had put between us and Him; He sees us afar off and runs to meet us, obliterating it. And, indeed, the grace of God is greater even than Jesus' picture of it. For God was not content to wait until men should return to Him, but into the far country sent His own Son, who comes down to us even amid the swine-troughs, and standing by us and touching us on the shoulder, says to us, 'Come, and let us return to the Father.'

It was a lonely path He trod,
From every human soul apart,
Known only to Himself and God
Was the deep grief that filled His heart;
Yet from the track He turned not back
Till, where I lay in sin and shame
He found me—Blessed be His Name.

[1] Fénelon.

Capital and Interest

Luke xix. 13.—'Trade ye herewith till I come' (R.V.).

LIFE is very commonly regarded from the standpoint of an investment of capital which yields a certain amount of interest. It was conceived in this figure by the Lord Jesus Himself. 'Trade ye herewith till I come.' And what is our capital? What capital did the Master Himself invest in the affairs of men? He had a capital of thought and He invested it in thoughtfulness. He had a capital of emotion, and He invested it in widest sympathy. He had a capital of will, and He always invested its power in the ministry of rectitude and truth. This was the sort of capital with which Jesus traded, and this is the kind of capital with which we are to trade amid the new opportunities of our own life.

Now, in these realms interest is in proportion to the amount of capital we invest. Small investment will yield but small returns; if the investment be increased the interest will be correspondingly enlarged. Carelessness in the employment of life's capital results in dwindling and exhausted returns. This teaching applies to all kinds of interest, even that interest which we call our interest in things, our interest in persons, in causes, in common affairs. The interest we get from them depends upon the capital we put into them.

1. We may find the application of the principle in *the æsthetic realm.* What is the condition of retaining a keen interest in music? It is the maintenance of an investment of capital. If we add to capital we assuredly add to the interest. The devotion of more time, more thought, more eager listening, and more diligent persistence, will result in an enriched and enlarged commerce, and the genius of music will pour her treasures into our souls. Charles Darwin ceased to invest in this realm; he gave no thought or attention to music, and so he lost the power of appreciation.

It is even so in the realm of art. The men who get most out of it are the men who put most into it. When John Ruskin began to examine the papers of Turner, he found at least twenty thousand slips, upon which the great artist had sketched all manner of initial

themes. He was investing in ideas, and we have the results in his marvellous productions.

¶ John Gibson, the famous sculptor, writes in his diary: 'I renewed my visits to the Vatican. It is not to criticize that I go there, but to seek instruction in my art, which the Greeks carried to perfection. Those few masterpieces which have come down to us, though I have dwelled upon them thousands of times, still at every new visit are contemplated by me with fresh wonder and admiration, such is the influence which anything perfect, both in design and execution, has upon the mind. Those grand works of the Greeks are ever new, and always produce fresh enchantment however often they may be surveyed.'

2. We may follow the application of the principle into *the social realm*. Even on the elementary plane of a subscription, our interest is really born with our contribution. It is surprising what a little investment of this kind will do to create and quicken a man's attention. And if we increase our capital, our interest in the institution increases with it. If we begin to withdraw our contribution, the interest itself is withdrawn. In all social causes our humane interests are in precise proportion to our investments.

3. If we ascend still higher, into *the affectional realm*, into the home of love, we shall find that the gracious interest is determined by the quality of our investment. It is so in the relationship of husband and wife. The love of courtship is often larger and fuller than the love of married life, and it is simply because in the courtship there were more kindly courtesies and more reverent and constant devotion. It frequently happens that, when the wedded life begins, the delicate courtesies that prevailed before the wedding are dropped, and life becomes grey and conventional. All of which means that capital has been withdrawn and the returns have suffered. Everybody knows how true this is in the relationship of friend and friend. If the capital of thoughtfulness is withdrawn, fraternal interest begins to drop.

4. And in the last place, the principle finds application in the highest of all regions, *the spiritual realm*. Many of us have so little interest in the things of the highest because we put no capital into them. We know perfectly well that if we put as little into anything else, say, into our business, or even into our pleasures, we should have no returns. Take the interest we derive from the Word of God. What right have many of us to expect any interest at all? We put nothing into it, and yet sometimes we expect an abundant return. What have we invested in the New Testament? How much of thought, how much of imagination, how much of sympathy, how much of sheer will?

¶ Dr Thomas Chalmers had been minister of the Fifeshire parish of Kilmany for some eight years ere he attained to a vital knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and when at length the light broke into his soul, it revealed much that had been hidden from him. It gave him new thoughts about God and religion and a new sense of the value of the Bible. One of his elders was an old saint named John Bonthron, who lived close to the Manse and was a frequent visitor there; and it is told how it grieved him during the dark years to find the young minister continually engrossed in all manner of employments—experiments in chemistry, studies in philosophy, the cultivation of his garden. And once he said: 'I find you aye busy, sir, with one thing or another, but come when I may, I never find you at your studies for the Sabbath.' 'Oh,' was the reply, 'an hour or two on the Saturday evening is quite enough for that.' Then all was changed. 'I never come in now, sir,' said the old man, 'but I find you aye at your Bible.' 'All too little, John,' was the answer, 'all too little.'[1]

Our interest in prayer is determined by the capital we invest. Look at the example of our Lord, the Christ. 'Rising a great while before day, he went up into a mountain apart, to pray.' 'He continued all night in prayer to God.' 'And as he prayed his sweat was as it were great drops of blood.' Has our season of prayer any resemblance to these? Does it suggest energy and sacrifice?

¶ 'All night,' said a Hindoo Saivite woman to a missionary, 'when the household is sleeping, I go alone to an upper room, and stretch out my hands to the God of all, and cry with a long, loud cry.'

Many of us have scarcely begun to pray at all. We have only played at praying. It has not been a mighty business; it has only been

[1] D. Smith, *Man's Need of God*, 43.

a harmless convention. We have put nothing into it, and therefore we have taken nothing out. We have 'prayed amiss.'

Our primary concern must be with the capital, and God will attend to the interest. Let us invest, in high and holy things, all our mind and soul and heart and strength. And there will be returned to us in interest and affection 'good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over.' [1]

FEAR AND EXCUSE IN LIFE'S FAILURES

Luke xix. 20, 21.—'And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I kept laid up in a napkin: For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow.'

The literature of Excuse is the oldest thing in history. When, for the second time, Adam opens his mouth in Eden, he does so in the ungallant excuse, 'The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat' (Gen. iii. 12). Well might the Rabbis warn us, however, not to charge our sin upon Adam, for 'Every man is the Adam of his own soul.' Moses, refusing the rôle of deliverer of Israel, quaintly urged: 'Lord, I am not eloquent, neither since yesterday, neither heretofore, . . . for I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue' (Exod. iv. 10). And Aaron, in extenuation of the Golden Calf, pleaded the inherent perversity of things: 'Thou knowest the people, that they are set on mischief. So they gave it me: and I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf' (Exod. xxxii. 22-24). A sentry, having allowed his prisoner to escape, gave the hard-worked excuse, which ever since has been so convenient to 'pottering' men: 'As thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone' (1 Kings xx. 40). Gehazi, rebuked by Elisha for following the lure of Naaman's gold, stoutly asserted, in the manner of a child, 'Thy servant went no whither' (2 Kings v. 25). And we might follow up the other excuses of the Old Testament and even of the world's history, old foes with new faces, and find them famous or infamous as the case may be. But it is needless. There is, however, from our modern days, the unworthy and self-deceiving apology of Burns for his irregular life, which we may quote because it is germane to our subject. In extenuation of his faults, Burns, like many a man before and since, and like 'the wicked servant' of the parable, laid the blame on God and on nature:

> Thou knowest that thou hast formèd me
> With passions wild and strong.

Lines that all lovers of Burns regret. The literature of Excuse is a very revealing study, if we had space for it here; from the dastardly excuses for heinous faults down to the whimsical and kindly apology of Charles Murray [2] for his loitering schoolboy: 'But it wisna his wyte (fault) he was late.' We are all dug out of the same pit, and are not better than our fathers.

I

THE PARABLE OF THE POUNDS

It has been too hastily assumed that the parable of the Talents (Matt. xxv. 14-30) and the parable of the Pounds (Luke xix. 11-28) are versions made by the Evangelists of the same original. But this is unlikely. For, it is quite in the manner of Jesus (or, for that matter, of any teacher) to repeat to different audiences, or even to the same, foundation truths which can only be taught or learned line upon line. Dr Chalmers, the Scots ecclesiastic and preacher, when blamed for iteration in his teaching, is reported to have said: 'Iteration! Iteration! why, everything I have accomplished in my life has been done by iteration.' Jesus, we may well believe, told 'the old, old story' again and again, and so fixed it in the memory of His reporters who have handed it down to us that it has become a treasure of time and a joy for ever. Besides, there are certain differences between the parables which distinguish them from one another; the parable of the Pounds, in particular, has its starting-point in the almost contemporary visit of Archelaus to Rome to obtain the kingdom of Judæa in succession to his father, an attempt in which, as the parable hints, he was opposed by 'an embassage' of

[1] J. H. Jowett, *Things That Matter Most*, 123.
[2] *Hamewith.*

fifty Jews (*cf.* Luke xix. 14). But the underlying message is the same in both, the duty of working with courage, and waiting with patience till the Master come. Both parables have at their heart the same character-study of a man who excuses himself; indeed, it is the *motif* of the story in each; we may call it the psychology of an Excuse. And, if we understand what we are saying, we might add that Jesus seems fascinated, or rather haunted, with the problem and the pain of the excuses men make for themselves. We find Him laying His emphasis on that feature of human nature, in the parables of the Talents and the Pounds; and in the 'Marriage Feast' (Matt. xxii. 5) one pleads his farm and another his merchandise as an excuse for refusing the king's invitation. But it is in the 'Great Supper' (Luke xiv. 15-19) that we have the most significant exposure of the excuses which keep men from the Kingdom of God: 'They all with one consent began to make excuse; I have bought a piece of ground . . . have me as excused; I have bought five yoke of oxen . . . accept my excuse; I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' We may say with certainty that the subject 'fascinated' Jesus; how He brooded over it, and thought with amazement on the excuses, 'the lie in the soul,' by which men deluded themselves! In the parable of the Pounds, 'Another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: for I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow.' Well does the French proverb say, *Qui s'excuse s'accuse*, 'He who excuses himself, accuses himself.' Sir Edward Clarke[1] has the pungent reflection: 'A man who is good at excuses is never good at anything else.' If the power of the mind is seen in the life it aims at and achieves, the valuation of the third man in the parable is extremely low—nothing at all. For with this class, the energy which should turn the mills of life is wasted in showing reasons why, at an unfortunate time, the current failed for their venture. We have all met people whose excuses for faulty character or work undone are as elaborate as they are worthless.

[1] *The Story of My Life.*

II

THE INSIGHT OF JESUS

Before we come to the excuse itself, we should note the unerring directness with which Jesus puts His finger on the sore place, the one fatal flaw in character. It was said of Him by Simeon (Luke ii. 35) that in His presence 'thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed;' or, as Professor Moffatt phrases it in his translation, 'to bring out the secret aims of many a heart.' Every heart yields up its secret to Him. 'O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me' (Ps. cxxxix. 1). He is the touchstone by which the springs of character are laid bare. As the light of a star, passing across the spectroscope, is broken up and discloses its nature and composition, so every contact of Christ with us brings a revelation of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Men are revealed when His light falls across their life and conduct; when, as Wordsworth says, 'they come into the presence and power of greatness,' then the poor life shrivels up, revealing its baseness. The insight of Jesus, all confess it.

Nathanael, though his life was not poor, asks in amazement, 'Whence knowest thou me?' (John i. 48), and at Samaria's well a woman found Him who told her 'all things that ever she did.' In the Gospels Jesus reveals His own mind concerning Himself; but also, every man and woman He met gave up to His kind but searching glance the last secret of their character. Truly, Jesus is a dweller in the Innermost, and in nothing so much as in His exposure of 'the lie in the soul.'

III

THE NATURE OF THE EXCUSE

Many a man has found, if we may use the word, something almost 'uncanny' in this dissection of an excuse, as Jesus tracks it to its last refuge in a man's distrust of God and of his own soul. This is what the parable is about; a study of the psychology of an excuse, and of the fears that cripple us for character and duty.

1. *Distrust of God.*—'You are such a hard man, picking up what you never laid down, and reaping what you never sowed.' Surely

an entirely unworthy conception of God. Yet, it is Jesus' searching criticism of the false foundation on which the contemporary Judaism had built up the religious life. It was a contract-religion—so much for so much; the religion which, before his conversion, utterly broke Paul's heart and made him the 'wretched man' he said he was. The joy of God, the rapture and delight of the soul, had, except in pious circles here and there, gone out of Judaism, and men were toiling at their religion, working out a contract as they thought, in the service of a hard master to whom they doled out their duties, some *quid pro quo*, so much for so much; yet always leaving an irredeemable balance on the wrong side, a balance they never could make up. And they lost heart over it, this is the 'wicked' servant's case, a man who had lost heart over what he thought an impossible task. Many, the labouring and the heavy laden, altogether gave up trying, becoming 'publicans and sinners,' or like him in the other parable, they buried their talent, 'that one talent which is death to hide.' Here our Lord pronounces a valuation on religion as the third servant felt it. It was the service of an austere man. But this is not the God of Jesus, who is not a merchant, but a Father. Yet, as a man's God is, so is his religion. We are not, however, outside His house working for wages. Not servants, but sons—even in the far country; the Father Himself loveth you. We are not dealing with an 'austere man,' but with Him who knows how to give good gifts to His children. That was the third servant's fault (or misfortune) that he did not know the character of God. But what a difference it makes to religion and life, when we open our hearts to let the fatherly love of God pass through the house; there, and here, His servants shall serve Him, *and they shall see His face.*

Jesus, the very thought of Thee
With sweetness fills my breast.

We owe it to give back to one another, for help in our despairing moods, the face of God once more. That would release many 'a pound' tied up in a napkin, and life would be filled with sweet content. The wicked servant's excuse revealed that his was a religion without love. But it is on love that Dante builds up the moral basis of the *Purgatorio*, the hill we all must climb; he builds it on the great line of St Francis: 'Set love in order, thou that lovest Me.'[1] At the heart of the servant's failure there is a defect in love; for to him, and, alas! to many even in our churches, and to a great multitude outside, God seems a hard master, who sets impossible tasks to man. This is the gist of the parable. But when we learn the mind of Christ, we shall praise Him for the discovery of the Father. The unprofitable servant is judged out of his own mouth, that he did not know God, or knew Him only on the side of His austerity.

Ah! God is other than we think.
But learn, what God is like.

2. *Distrust of our own soul's power.*—The servant, as we have seen, was afraid of God, doubted His goodness, His fairness, His Fatherly interest, and His eager desire for our success and not our failure. All this despair of God is involved in the miserable creature's picture of his master as an austere man. But he distrusted himself as well, for he had lost the magic key by which 'doors great and small fly ope' at our touch.' Trust in the soul's values and powers proves itself real by the kind of life it achieves; while the converse is also true. No trust, no achievement. And the servant had no conviction that God was man's ally, and not an exactor; hence his fruitless life. It is worth dwelling on the intimate connection between fear and failure as it is shown in the text—the psychology of fear. Olden preachers, though they did not know the word psychology, perfectly understood the connection. They knew the thing itself, as Solomon did when he prayed that every man might know 'the plague of his own heart'; and Bunyan, from whose keen eye nothing vital in religion seems to have escaped, was a better psychologist than he knew, when he painted the picture of Timorous and Mistrust who were frightened by the sight of the lions, and missed the Celestial City.

We take the parable, then, for a study in Fear and Excuse; the order is right, for the first is the mother of the second. In religion, fear, of course, has its good side: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom'; and in morals also, fear may be salutary—fear sitting

[1] E. Gardner, *Dante*, 107.

as the guardian over the soul. But fear (as here) has its paralysing effect, to tie the hands and daunt the heart. That is its meaning in the mouth of 'the wicked servant,' 'what causes flight, a fear that is dread and terror.' And this kind of fear has always been regarded as the main evil of life; how well every pastor knows it, in his own battles with the dread enemy, and much more in the battles he has to fight for the reassurance of some broken heart or grieved mind. The great aim of all ancient philosophies (that of the Stoics, and even of the Epicureans) was to break the front of fear. Fear and failure go together as in the parable; for the man who trembles before his job has not his eye on the object, devotion to which can alone give him the best results in life. It is up to a man who would win through to rid himself of this paralysing dread, the fear of life, the shrinking from things. We dwell on the realism of Jesus, in His picture of the unhappy man fumbling over his 'pound' which he had kept tied up in a napkin; the reality of it never fades. But the nobler attitude is not wanting in the picture, for it is represented by the talent or pound risked in the use of it; there is the man who does not shrink from life, but is out for attack. Mostly, 'men can who think they can.'

In an illuminating study of the 'Psychology of Power,' J. Arthur Hadfield speaks of the *surplus fear* in human nature 'which tends to flow into the wrong channels, producing fear of poverty, fear of sickness and pain, fear of the future, fear of what might have been, fear of ourselves, fear of death, fear of life, fear of failure.' And Captain Hadfield, with a reference to the corresponding parable of the Talents, goes on: 'Those who have raised discussion as to whether we should "fear God," have, I think, failed to appreciate the difference between the fear that paralyses, and the fear akin to hope that urges us to active service. To fear God may mean that we are afraid of God because He may punish us, and in this case the fear is paralysing and brings forth no good result—"I know thee that thou art an austere man . . . and I hid thy talent in the ground."'

The Bible re-echoes with cries of fear: 'They shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way' (Eccles. xii. 5); 'Fear in the night' (Cant. iii. 8); 'Without were fightings, within were fears' (2 Cor. vii. 5); and we start, when we read St John's roll of lost souls, to find among them 'the fearful, the craven' (Rev. xxi. 8). But, on the other hand, the Bible is the unique cordial of the doubting heart: 'In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength' (Isa. xxx. 15); 'Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not' (Isa. xxxv. 4). The Old Testament shines with the starlit word 'Fear not,' which ever gleams through the rifts in the cloud of our discontents. This also was the favourite salutation of Jesus; to the sick, the fearful, and the sad He passed His own word 'Be not afraid'; it is like hearing, when far out at sea, the voice of the watchman reporting 'All's well with the night.' In the Upper Room in face of the fears and doubts of the disciples He said, 'Let not your heart be troubled; Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.'

IV

THE DEFECT IN LOVE

The criterion of character is the life it achieves. Judged by this, the servant had failed from lack of the spirit of devotion to a supreme object. Hence his fear and his excuse. Want of devotion led him, in a mood of despair, to tie up his pound in a napkin. His crippling fault was a defect in love; had he been under the influence of a passionate devotion, he would have taken all risks, even the risk of loss, and losing his life would have found it. Love is behind every adventure in living. If only we could have it, we should take risks like the poet—

> The abyss is worth a leap, however wide,
> When life, sweet life, is on the other side.

In past days, the staple of all sermons to young people, held out as the better part a supreme object in life, which must be pursued with tireless devotion. No advice could have been more healthy in its tone or in the results it achieved. For this alone can overcome our fears, because it taps the fountains of power at their source. As Hadfield says: 'Man's might is not to be measured by the stagnant waters in the well, but by the limitless supply from the

clouds of heaven. This is the dynamic of faith; the power possessed by the Christian religion of liberating energies which can transform the living soul into a quickening spirit.' And Jesus made this the summary of religion, love to God, and love to man; He did not rely on rules and precepts but on power from on high; upon what Chalmers called 'the expulsive power of a higher affection.' The servant failed because he lacked this urge of life, and in his poverty-stricken heart there was nothing to take its place. Bunyan with his insight has told us that it was only Great-heart who could pull down Doubting Castle and kill Giant Despair. The servant, however, in his wearied words (weariness is on his brow) was a lost soul who had not so much as tried life, but had given it up as hopeless. But despair of life is the unpardonable sin; this appears in our Lord's stern words about the capacities of character, which is the meaning of pounds, that have slowly perished by disuse. In the natural sphere, Darwin, who was a keen observer of all life, knew this well, for he lamented that, though in youth he had loved poetry, music and all the finer things in literature, in latter years he had lost taste and power to enjoy them; absorbed in physical science and material facts, he had not cultivated his capacities, and had not put his 'pound' to usury. Could he begin life again, he said, he would repair this loss. But there is an irretrievable in every man's life. The Parable unfolds it, and the judgment is in William Watson's haunting lines:

> So on our souls the visions rise
> Of that fair life we never led;
> They flash a splendour past our eyes,
> We start, and they have fled:
> They pass, and leave us with blank gaze
> Resigned to our ignoble days.

We come back to where we began, 'Set love in order, thou that lovest me.' As preachers we fail every time if we have not kindled the lamp of love in the life of the young. 'Yet I love Thee and adore.' Supreme devotion to a great object expels fear and does not know excuse. Let the great Puritan have the last word as he speaks of the Captain of souls: 'I perceived that He had been a great warrior, and had fought with and slain him that had the power of death, but not without great danger to Himself, which made me love Him the more.'

W. M. Grant.

A Principle of Judgment

Luke xix. 22.—'Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee.'

We use the text not to interpret its exact meaning for him to whom the words are addressed in Christ's story, but for the principle within it. It gives a principle of judgment. 'He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained.' It may be a truth out of fashion, but it is not a truth out of date, nor ever will be where the gospel of the Lord Jesus is preached.

It is not superfluous or superstitious, as some might think who, owning a duty to conscience and to moral principle, would claim that this suffices. One truth must not hide another. The truth that the judgment of God is moral—*i.e.* according to our conscience—must not disguise from us the other truth, that it is passed by God. Few who really know themselves will deny that the sense of answerableness to One with whom we have to do strengthens and quickens conscience.

It is at this point that we take up the principle in the text. 'Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee.' What had the servant said? He had given his version of his master's character, and therefore of the way in which he would judge: 'I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down.' Never mind now *what* he thought of the master's judgment, or how far he thought rightly. He did think, and his thought was right enough to judge him by: 'Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee.' His thought would have been enough to guide him right, only he did not apply it honestly or thoroughly. When the master took it out of his mouth and used it, it gave a very different result.

There is a lesson here for those who, like most of us, think we have principles and a conscience.

It is a good feature of modern life, and one which we should be very sorry to see altered, that there is so much public honour paid to

principle and character. It is astonishing what a large stock of commonplaces there is in praise of public spirit and uprightness, and generosity, and fairness, and philanthropy, and liberality. Yet, when we seriously think, there is something rather awful to us about this. 'Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee.' What will our own professed principles look like when the mouth of our Judge drives them home? Or rather, what will our use of them appear?

Take the things which we praise so glibly—are they really ours?

1. We praise *fairness*. How many men can we really trust to give a perfectly fair judgment in a case in which their own interest or credit is involved? We *can* find them, thank God; but in doing so we recognize the more the rareness of their splendid equity. As George Eliot puts it: 'Human impartiality, whether judicial or not, can hardly escape being more or less loaded.'

¶ Dr Johnson was dining one day, along with others, at a friend's house, and in the course of conversation an important debate was mentioned. One of the guests remarked, 'That Mr Pitt's speech, on that occasion, was the best he had ever read.' Dr Johnson remained silent for a little, and then remarked—'That speech I wrote in a garret in Exeter-street.' The company bestowed lavish encomiums on Johnson: one, in particular, praised his impartiality; observing, that he dealt out reason and eloquence with an equal hand to both parties. 'That is not quite true,' said Johnson; 'I saved appearances tolerably well, but I took care that the *Whig dogs* should not have the best of it.'[1]

2. We multiply platitudes about munificence and *liberality*. How many men give the half of what they receive, even though the rest may be enough to keep them and theirs in comfort; how many even make giving and helping their hobby as others make motor-cars or horses? How many really stint themselves of anything in order to give?

¶ Well might Jeffrey say that Carlyle would not have known poverty if he had not been himself a giver. His own habits were Spartan in their simplicity, and from the moment he began to earn his small salary as an usher at Annan, the savings of his thrift were spent in presents to his father and mother and in helping to educate his brother. I too can bear witness that the same generous disposition remained with him to the end. In his later years he had an abundant income, but he never added to his own comforts or luxuries. His name was not seen on charity lists, but he gave away every year perhaps half what he received. I was myself in some instances employed by him to examine into the circumstances of persons who had applied to him for help. The stern censor was in these instances the kindest of Samaritans. It was enough if a man or woman was miserable. He did not look too curiously into the causes of it. I was astonished at the profuseness with which he often gave to persons little worthy of his liberality.[1]

[1] A. Murphy, *Life of Johnson*, 44.

3. Take *public spirit* and faithful devotion to public interest. If we deduct what is really due to a desire for credit or display, how much comes of real unselfish desire to further, at the cost of time and labour and personal comfort, the public welfare? We may rightfully and thankfully say that there is a great deal, and yet own that the heap looks a great deal smaller than it did before the chaff of compliment and conventionality was winnowed out of it.

¶ 'I have but one idea,' says the Prime Minister, referring to his work for the community, 'which was an idea that I inherited, and it was the idea of service, a service to the people of the country. My father lived in that belief all his life, and behind him members of my family, in an obviously more restricted way, practised the same thing. It is a tradition; it is in our bones, and we have to do it. That service seemed to lead one by way of business and County Council into Parliament, and it has led one through various strange paths to where one is; but the ideal remains the same, because all my life I believed from my heart the words of Browning, "All service ranks the same with God." It makes very little difference whether a man is driving a tramcar, or sweeping streets or being Prime Minister, if he only brings to that service everything that is in him and performs it for the sake of mankind.'[2]

4. Or let us follow the matter a step further; let us get behind talk and profession to the best thoughts of our own hearts. Take, for example,

[1] J. A. Froude, *Thomas Carlyle*, ii. 473.
[2] Stanley Baldwin, *On England, and Other Addresses*.

the high thought of *responsibility*. We acknowledge it: we attempt to apply it; but how far do we drive home the probe, and resolutely measure by the standard? How easily we are content with our own estimate of the extent of our responsibility, taken up all too lightly from some slack tradition, or borrowed from each other by those who, in the Apostle's words, 'measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.' We jog along, pleased with ourselves just because of our good principle, and responsibility which should be a spur and a sting, a thing of sacred fear and driving force, becomes a quiet ornament of our worthy character. Till one day there comes some man of zeal, clear faith in his cause, dogged perseverance, and unfaltering patience, and we see some old standing obstacle or abuse give way, or some line of improvement pushed forward a whole step before a sense of responsibility which really burns. But if this is so, what when the Judge Himself takes from us our own acknowledged word, and turns upon it His clear light, and draws out before our abashed and trembling conscience its plain meaning? 'Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee.' Out of our own sense of responsibility—driven home.

5. Perhaps there is one particular application of the principle to which we may point, all the more because it seems at first the very opposite of what the parable suggests. The servant said to himself, 'I know the master is a hard man,' and acted, as he thought, accordingly. Our danger is quite different. It is to say, 'I know that God is merciful,' and when we think of the *judgment*, to let the thought of that mercy quite blunt its edge. What if the judgment now should take the form, 'Thou knewest that I was merciful, wherefore then didst thou not prepare to meet a Judge who is a lover of mercy? wherefore wast thou not merciful that thou mightest obtain mercy?' Merciful in our judgments of others, looking for the brighter side and the better motive, lenient to their faults as to our own, putting away all that sharp criticism and distrust of others' sincerity, and stress on their failings, which makes so much of our talk, and, oddly enough, goes so easily with a very poor standard of conduct and character in the speaker. Merciful, again, in an active and strenuous way, trying earnestly to find in our public office or our private life the ways in which we can better the lot of the weak, and the poor, and the suffering—of those upon whom the weight of our social fabric presses with grinding force.

¶ Wordsworth tells us how, in the early days of the French Revolution, he and his friend, Michael Beaupuy,

> Chanced
> One day to meet a hunger-bitten girl,
> Who crept along fitting her languid gait
> Unto a heifer's motion, by a cord
> Tied to her arm, and picking thus from the lane
> Its sustenance, while the girl with pallid hands
> Was busy knitting in a heartless mood
> Of solitude, and at the sight my friend
> In agitation said, ''Tis against *that*
> That we are fighting.'[1]

And, further, merciful in the matter where, if it be rightly considered, God's mercy most directly prompts in bringing the tidings of that mighty and all-illuminating mercy of God in Jesus Christ to those who still cower in the fear and gloom of heathenism, 'having no hope, and without God in the world.'

¶ On the eve of his departure for Arabia, Ion Keith-Falconer addressed some farewell words to the students of Glasgow and Edinburgh. His appeal at the end was the most telling part of his speech: 'While vast continents are shrouded in almost utter darkness, and hundreds of millions suffer the horrors of heathenism and of Islam, the burden of proof lies upon you to show that the circumstances in which God has placed you were meant by Him to keep you out of the mission field.'[2]

How, if we neglect that duty, shall we face the challenge of the judgment, 'Thou knewest that I was a merciful God'?

A Law of Life

Luke xix. 26.—'Unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him.'

THERE are several instances in the Gospels of our Lord's repetition of sayings which seem to have been, if we may use the expression, favourites with Him; as, for instance, 'There are first which shall be last, and there are last

[1] *The Prelude*, IX.
[2] *Ion Keith-Falconer of Arabia*, 112.

which shall be first'; or, again, 'The servant is not greater than his master, nor the disciple than his Lord.' This text is one of these. We find it in Mark; we find it twice in Matthew and twice in Luke. We may take it as certain that this was a characteristic utterance of Christ often repeated. It expresses in pithy form a 'natural law' which holds good 'in the spiritual world.'

The principle of our text shapes all life. It is a paradox, but it is a deep truth. The paradox is meant to spur attention, curiosity and enquiry. The key to it lies here—to use is to have. There is a possession which is no possession. To have anything may only mean that if we were going to draw up a catalogue of our properties, we would set it down among the rest: to possess anything means to put it to use, to cultivate it, to make the most of it, to exercise it, to identify ourselves with it. The miser owns his hoard; but, for all the close grip his hands would keep upon it if any one attempted to take it from him, he does not *possess* it. He sets it to no use—brings out none of the possibilities that are hidden in it. What we use we have; and all else is, as St Luke puts it, but 'seeming' to have.

1. Take the application of this principle to common life.

As regards our *material possessions*, it is a complaint that is made against the present social arrangements and distribution of wealth that money makes money; that wealth has a tendency to clot, the rich man to get richer, and the poor man to get poorer. Just as in a basin of water, when the plug is out and circular motion is set up the little bits of foreign matter that may be there all tend to get together, so it is in regard to these external possessions. 'Unto every one which hath shall be given'; and people grumble about that and say, 'It never rains but it pours, and the man that needs money least gets it most easily.' Of course. Treasure used grows; treasure hoarded rusts and dwindles. The millionaire will double his fortune by a successful speculation. The man with half a dozen large shops drives the small tradesman out of the field. So it is all round; 'Unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not even that he hath shall be taken away.'

This is equally true as regards *the powers of our body*. The blacksmith's arm we have all heard about; the sailor's eye, the pianist's wrist, the juggler's fingers, the surgeon's deft hand—all these come by use. 'To him that hath shall be given.' And the same man who has cultivated one set of organs to an almost miraculous fineness or delicacy or strength will, by the operation of the other half of the same principle, have all but atrophied another set. Use is strength; use makes growth. We have what we employ. And the organs that we do not use we carry about with us rather as a weight attached to us than as a possession.

And we find this law also going to determine *our position in the world and our work*. The man that can do a thing gets it to do. In the long run the tools come to the hand that can use them. So here is one medical man's consulting-room crammed full of patients, and his neighbour next door has scarcely one. The briefless barrister complains that there is no middle course between having nothing to do and being overwhelmed with briefs. 'To every one which hath shall be given'—the man can do a thing, and he gets it to do—'and from him that hath not even that which he hath shall be taken away.' That law largely settles every man's place in the world.

2. The same principle operates in the *inner life*.

It has much to do in making *character*. We see its results, most blessed or most disastrous, in the working of conscience. Use it; obey it; listen for its voice; never thwart it, and it grows more and more sensitive, more and more educated, more and more sovereign in its decisions. Neglect it; or go in its teeth, and it dwindles. It is even possible for a man, by long-continued indifference to the voice within that says 'Thou shalt' or 'Thou shalt not,' to come at last to the point when he hears it no longer, or when it ceases to speak.

She felt it die a little every day,
Flutter less wildly, and more feebly pray.
Stiller it grew; at times she felt it pull,
Imploring thinly something beautiful,
And in the night was painfully awake,
And struggled in the darkness till day-break,
For not at once, not without any strife
It died; at times it started back to life.
Slowly she was aware her soul had died
Within her body; for no more it cried,

Vexed her no more ; and now monotonous life
Easily passed ; she was exempt from strife ;
And from her soul was willing to be freed.
She could not keep what she would not feed ;
And she was well ; above all bliss or care ;
Hunger and thirst were her emotions bare.[1]

This principle largely settles our *convictions* too. If a man holds any truth slackly, or, in the case of truths that are meant to influence life and conduct, does not let it influence these, then that is a kind of having truth that is sure to end in losing it. If you want to lose your convictions grasp them loosely—do not act upon them, do not take them for guides of your life—and they will soon relieve you of their unwelcome presence. If you wish mind and knowledge to grow, grip what you do know, and let it dominate you, as it ought.

¶ Mark Sabre, talking to Nona, in Mr A. S. M. Hutchinson's novel, *If Winter Comes*, says : 'You cannot possibly be successful if you have not convictions ; yes, and narrower than that —only one conviction—that you are right and that the others are wrong.'

3. This twofold law holds good in *the revelation of God's truth*. Much of Jesus' teaching was given in parables, and His reply to those who asked why He taught so was in the words of the text : 'Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance : but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath' (Matt. xiii. 12). The truth was veiled because it had to be a test as well as a revelation. It could not come by mathematical demonstration. Only the seeker who put it to the test could find it.

'To him that hath shall be given.' If you will make that truth your own by loyal faith and honest obedience, if you will grapple it to your heart, then you will learn more and more. Whatever tiny corner of the great whole you have grasped, hold on by that and draw it into yourselves. 'If any man wills to do his will he shall know.' That is Christ's promise ; and it will be fulfilled to us all. If, on the other hand, you have Christian truth and Christ, who is the Truth, in the fashion in which so many of us have it and Him—as a form, as a mere intellectual possession, so that we can repeat the creed without feeling that we are telling a lie, but when we go to market do not carry the Commandments with us—if that is our Christianity, then it will dribble away into nothing. We shall not be much the poorer for the loss of such a sham possession, but it will go, and the evidence of it will go. It drops out of the hands that are not clasped to hold it. It is just that a thing so neglected shall some day be a thing withdrawn.

[1] Stephen Phillips.

4. These words also look to *the future*. In the parable of the Talents as well as the Pounds the same broad truth is taught, that, for the life beyond, indefinite progress in all that is noble and beautiful and godlike in heart and character, in intellect and power, are certain ; that faith, hope, love here cultivated will flourish in that other world, and will bear fruit abundantly. Here the few things faithfully administered will be succeeded yonder by the many things royally ruled over. Here one small coin, as it were, is put into our hand—the faith and strength and purity of a Christian life—and there we shall possess the inheritance of which what we have here is but the earnest.

And the other side of the same principle works also. 'From him that hath not even that he hath shall be taken away from him.' When we see in others, or discover in ourselves, how it is possible for unused faculties to die entirely out, we shall feel that there is a solemn background of truth in the representation of what befell the unfaithful servant. Hopes unnourished are gone ; opportunities unimproved —gone ; capacities undeveloped—gone. 'Take it from him ;' he never was the better for it ; he never used it ; he shall have it no longer.

For blessings which while they were ours
Alas ! we knew not how to prize,
Until they spread their snow-white wings,
And faded, faded from our eyes,
Forgive us, Lord, forgive ![1]

Let us see to it that by faith and obedience we so use our gifts and opportunities as to get a firmer hold on the things that are eternal.

Strive ; and hold fast this truth of heaven—
To him that hath shall more be given.[2]

[1] Gregory Smith, *Fra Angelico and other Poems*.
[2] R. Bridges.

The Lord's Need

Luke xix. 34.—'The Lord hath need of him.'

Do our Lord's minute instructions to the two disciples whom He sent for the colt point to superhuman knowledge or to a previous arrangement with its owner? Perhaps the latter. The animal evidently belonged to a disciple to whom the message that the Lord needed it would appeal.

In the East the ass is held in high esteem. It is a somewhat larger and more serviceable animal than its despised descendant in our own country. Among the Jews the ass was the animal of peace, as the horse was of war. They found it extremely useful for three purposes: for riding, for bearing burdens, and for work in the field, such as ploughing. It was used for riding by both rich and poor. When Moses left Midian to return to Egypt, he took his wife and his two sons, and set them on an ass, while he strode on by their side. Balaam, the famous soothsayer of Mesopotamia, rode a she-ass. Persons of dignity and authority rode on asses of a silver-white colour. When the prophet Zechariah says that the Christ is 'lowly' because He would ride upon 'a colt, the foal of an ass,' the meaning is not that it is degrading to Him to use such an animal, but only that, although victorious, His mission is a peaceful one.

When fishes flew and forests walked
  And figs grew upon thorn,
Some moment when the moon was blood
  Then surely I was born;

With monstrous head and sickening cry
  And ears like errant wings,
The devil's walking parody
  On all four-footed things.

The tattered outlaw of the earth,
  Of ancient crooked will;
Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,
  I keep my secret still.

Fools! For I also had my hour;
  One far fierce hour and sweet:
There was a shout about my ears,
  And palms before my feet.[1]

[1] G. K. Chesterton.

The fact that our Lord had to borrow the animal on which He would display His royal state suggests the union in Him of absolute authority and utter poverty. He was a King, but with no earthly possessions of His own. The same blending of humiliation and majesty runs through all His life, and wherever there appears a special instance of the one, close beside it is sure to be seen an instance of the other. He had to be obliged to fishermen for the boat, but from that borrowed pulpit He spoke Divine wisdom. He had to be obliged to a lad in the crowd for barley loaves and fishes, but He took them into His hands and fed thousands. He had to owe His grave to Joseph, but He rose from it the Lord of Life. When He for once desired to stand forth as King, He had to borrow His regalia, and was indebted to this anonymous peasant for the colt on which He was meekly enthroned.

¶ Jesus is the Poor Man; the Poor Man who is strictly, absolutely, infinitely poor. He is the Mendicant who distributes alms; One who, Himself naked, clothes the naked; One who, Himself famishing, yet feeds others. He is the miraculous and superhuman Pauper, who changes the falsely rich into paupers and makes the poor truly rich.[1]

But the message to that villager opens out into the wider thought that Christ cannot assume His Kingdom without His servants' help. We are Christ's tools, the instruments by which He establishes His Kingdom. 'God mend all,' said one, and he was answered: 'We must help Him to mend it.'

How can it be said that the Lord hath need of anything? Milton says:

God doth not need
Either man's work or His own gifts. . . .
. . . . . His state
Is kingly: thousands at His bidding speed,
And post o'er land and ocean without rest.

But though God needs nothing, yet He graciously deigns to work by means of His creatures. He desires that men should be workers together with Him.

¶ An ancient legend relates that, as our Lord ascended the weary hill of Calvary, and stooped beneath the weight of His Cross, as perspiration fell from His sacred brow a woman in the crowd,

[1] G. Papini, *The Story of Christ*, 195.

overcome with pity and compassion, ran forward and wiped His brow with a handkerchief, and that, as a reward, the napkin retained for ever a picture of His sacred features. The story, though untrue in fact, seems to be true as a principle. It brings before us a characteristic of Christ's nature to be seen clearly throughout the Bible, namely, that He welcomed and rewarded actions slight in themselves, but prompted by love to Him. He accepted them not for His own sake, but for the good of those that helped Him.[1]

What are the things that stand out clearly in this incident?

1. We have *an authoritative demand* which does not contemplate the possibility of reluctance or refusal. 'The Lord hath need of him,' that was all. No explanation is given, no motive adduced for compliance. So kings speak. Jesus expects us to brush aside our own convenience and everything else. It should be enough that He needs us or anything that is ours.

¶ Christ asks, and deserves, and in innumerable instances receives, a service which the absolutism of Cæsar or Napoleon would never dare to seek. It pierces to the imagination and the motive. It rules us through the week as inexorably as on the Holy Day. It calls for every power of the soul, the mind, the body. It survives death, and runs on through all eternity. Mr Arthur Shearly Cripps delineates St Paul—'Knight of the Cross, the Nails, the Lance, Priest of Theophanies of pain.' He remembers his toil,

> Who, teaching Troas all a night,
> For Assos strode with earliest day.

He is shamed by the thoroughness and the selflessness of his devotion:

> He sail'd in dreams an Argonaut—
> A Seamless Coat his Fleece of Gold,—
> A war-worn voyager, he free'd
> Sheep fast within a giant's fold.

These are the demands of our King. They are beyond comparison great, but not a whit too great for Him to make.[2]

[1] A. R. Ryder, *The Vision of Christ*, 95.
[2] A. Smellie, *The Well by the Way*, 46.

2. We see an instance of *glad surrender*. There is nothing more blessed than to give in response to the requirement of love. And so, to Christ's authoritative demand, the only proper answer is obedience swift and glad, because it is loving. If the owner had begun to say to himself that he very much needed the colt, or that he saw no reason why some one else's beast should not have been taken, or that he would send the animal very soon but must have the use of him for an hour or two first, he would probably never have sent him at all, and so would have missed the greatest honour of his life. As soon as we know what Christ wants from us, without delay let us do it; for if we begin with delaying we shall probably end with declining. The Psalmist was wise when he laid emphasis on the swiftness of his obedience, and said, 'I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.'

3. Note *the reward* of lending to Jesus. St Mark, with his usual minute accuracy, gives Jesus' message to the owner of the colt thus: 'Say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him hither.' Christ only wishes a short loan of the animal, and it will come back far more precious in its master's eyes than ever it was before. Of course it would be, if the man was a disciple. How, in coming days, he would look at the colt, and think of the honour that had been done him when Jesus rode on *his* animal! If we wish anything to become precious, we shall be wise to lend it to Jesus, and when it comes back, as certainly it will, the touch of His fingers will have left abiding fragrance. We are of most worth to ourselves when we give ourselves to Him. Our possessions become most truly ours, our loves and joys are sweetest and brightest, when we lay them at His feet.

Palm Sunday

Luke xix. 37, 38.—'And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.'

THE Prophet of Galilee is being led in triumph as King to His capital. Many-coloured gar-

ments are turned into carpets over which He rides; palms by the wayside must give up their branches to accompany Him as trophies of victory; shouts of vociferous greeting resound on every side and loud Hosannas from the very children. He accepts it all. He does not attempt to check them. But He is not deceived by this boisterous welcome. It has been well remarked that 'He stood apart from His popularity.' He sees the shadow of the Cross among the palm branches. He hears through the Hosannas another cry, not far distant—'Crucify him.' But no one else could have imagined it or believed it possible, it was a change so sudden, so complete. On Sunday palm branches and Hosannas, on Friday the mocking of the multitude and a cross.

¶ Travelling through Switzerland, Napoleon was greeted with such enthusiasm that Bourrienne said to him, 'It must be delightful to be greeted with such demonstrations of enthusiastic admiration.'

'Bah!' replied Napoleon; 'this same unthinking crowd, under a slight change of circumstances, would follow me just as eagerly to the scaffold.'[1]

Palm Sunday ought to have something to say to us, if we can hear its voice and learn its lessons.

1. One thing we learn here is that the sympathies of the multitude are right. This great mass of people, untaught, ignorant, simple-minded, with no one to guide them, instinctively gave their honour and adoration to Christ. They had heard of His kindly works, His sympathy with all who were in sorrow, His uniform goodness and purity, and their hearts went out to Him. Their instincts, as we may call them, were right. But their opinions and judgments were weak and easily swayed.

The mob has an instinctive admiration and reverence for goodness, purity, generosity, courage, and self-denial, and will always applaud noble sentiments and noble deeds. But the people are easily swayed to the wrong side when those who lead them cleverly represent it as the right side. We may depend upon their instincts, but we cannot depend upon either their intelligent judgment or their stability, if their passions are excited by voices which play upon their ignorance for a selfish purpose. Everything depends upon those to whom they lend their ears—their guides and leaders. But what we learn first from this Palm Sunday scene is that there is something in the conscience and heart of the multitude which makes goodness attractive. And that thought should help all who work among them for Christ.

2. The ideals of the multitude are often coarse and material, and sorely need to be purified and raised. On that Palm Sunday they were chanting praises, not to the real Christ as He was, but to the imaginary Christ which they thought He ought to be. The crowd was happy; and immediately they began to suppose that this Stranger who was coming was as happy as they were, and was happy for the same reason. They began, even before they saw Him, to clothe Him with their own anticipations, and to impute to Him their own ideas. The rumour began to get about that here at last was the Deliverer from the hateful tyranny of Rome: so that by the time they met Jesus, they had already in their own minds appointed Him their Leader. They thought He was the Messiah whose purpose was to enrich them and the nation with wealth and bodily comfort, to relieve them of Rome's bondage and heavy taxation, and bring in a time of plenty and prosperity for the very poorest. That was what the shoutings and songs of Palm Sunday meant. And that sort of glorying and huzzaing could not last. They found out very soon that that coarse material work was not Christ's purpose at all, and then they turned against Him.

There is no real worship of Christ save that which is founded on a true understanding of His character and mission. He comes not to change things without, but to make the world slowly new by a change of the heart within. This is what we have to teach men about Jesus, whether they like Him for it or not. We have to preach Him as essentially, and above all things, the Saviour from sin. To win praises for Him on any other ground is a lie, and all such praises will soon pass away, as the Hosannas of Palm Sunday did. He comes not to gratify our carnal cravings, but to raise our ideals and fill us with a higher food.

3. Palm Sunday bids us go steadily on. We

[1] *Table Talk and Opinions of Napoleon the First*, 13.

are not to be elated by temporary triumphs, or cast down by the proved fickleness of those among whom we labour. There will always be sunshine and shadow in our course. We shall hear praises one day, and maybe only blame, censure, and slander the next. If we are engaged in any sort of public work we shall have the palm branches waved around us at one season, and ere long there will be no palm branches, but something not unlike the shadow of a cross. In fact, in all good, self-forgetting, and saving work there will be these fluctuations. And we need to steady our heart's purpose by sitting at the feet of Christ.

We live in a time of extraordinary publicity. Gossip, scandal, praise, and blame beset every life, and many people are tempted to watch for applause or for censure as though they were tests of success. Politicians with their ears to the ground, journalists pandering to popular passion, preachers tickling the public ear—these are signs of the times which reveal the itching for popularity.

¶ John Bunyan, in his *Brief Account of his Call to the Ministry*, tells us how pride and self-conceit and such vices are 'easily blown up at the applause of every unadvised Christian, to the endangering of a poor creature to fall into the condemnation of the devil.' In his later days, when his popularity as a preacher was altogether phenomenal, we are told that 'It pleased him, but he was on the watch against the pleasure of being himself admired. A friend complimented him once after service on "the sweet sermon" which he had delivered. "You need not remind me of that," he said, "The Devil told me of it before I was out of the pulpit."'[1]

In our time, as always, there is but one kind of man which in the end wins a worthy victory. It is the man who depends neither on praise nor on blame. He leads his life instead of following it. He does his duty and bears his cross; and finally he is remembered, not because he was popular or unpopular, but because he accomplished the work which was given him to do, and was so busy saving others that he had no time to save himself.

¶ When Wilberforce was straining every energy to get his bill for the emancipation of slaves passed, a lady once said to him, 'Mr Wilberforce, I'm afraid you are so busy about those slaves that you are neglecting your own soul.' 'True, madam,' he replied; 'I had quite forgotten that I have one.' It seems a strange answer, but it contains much of the essence of Christianity.[1]

Though hopes which made the world seem half Divine
Fade in thy clasp and suffer low decline,
If thou for others' hopes exchangest thine,
It is enough.

[1] Froude, *Bunyan*, 180.

A Meek King!

Luke xix. 38.—'Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord.'

Zech. ix. 9.—'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.'

In entering Jerusalem Jesus presented Himself in character to the assembled nation. During His ministry His task had been to insist upon the Kingdom, and yet to avoid all attempts to make Him king. For over two years He had managed the populace as a skilful rider manages a restive horse, now drawing and now slackening rein. But now at last there was no danger of a revolution, and, indeed, no time for it.

Jesus was born to be a king, but a king whose authority rests not on compulsion but on His power to persuade the minds of men, and a king not parted from His people by the wide world of circumstance but sharing their privations and their lowliness; and He maintained that a kingdom founded thus would spread from sea to sea, and would last from age to age. That was a frank contradiction of what men have commonly believed, and they might very well not see the reason and the hopefulness of His plan, and they might be pardoned if they paused for information. There was nothing that, on the face of it, should have appealed to the multitude, yet it was received with the thoughtless clamour of the whole loud city. Some people would like to applaud sermons, and there are sermons which are quite adequately appraised by such a welcome. Applause is a relief to one's feelings, and, like any other discharge of feeling, it helps men to remain after an appeal what they were before it. But any serious presenta-

[1] J. W. Jack, *After His Likeness*, 42.

tion of truth asks for silence that it may be considered.

The passage in Zechariah which suggested to Jesus the form of His appeal to the crowd is a touching instance of how hard it is steadily to keep hold of a Divine thought. Two verses in the middle of a chapter present themselves as the perfect utterance of a man who sees what the true King of all the world must be. At His coming the peoples will lay aside all weapons of war—chariot and battle-bow—for He does not need such aids as these. 'He will *speak* peace,' says the prophet; His Kingdom grows by the power of His word. Without any of those pageantries which have defended the dignity of kings, His power will stand unshaken. That is a picture such as occurs elsewhere in the Old Testament, and it shows how the Spirit of God was working in the hearts of men. But the prophet could not wholly escape from the world he lived in. He had spoken for a moment in advance of his age, as if the clouds had parted and he had seen the naked face of God's heaven, but the clouds drift back again, and he sees little more than his fellows do; and the chapter runs out to its end, spirited, picturesque but sanguinary.

1. In this symbolic action our Lord utters something of His mind about the Kingdom. And first of all, He wanted men to realize that it was a fulfilment. In one sense it was a new thing in the world, as no man before had been able to give it reality; but it was also an old thing, which for ages had lived in the heart and hope of men. Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, held in high honour the hopes and dreams, and even the gropings of His brethren. He knew that they did not always see their way with equal clearness, and they often chose their words badly; and yet He knew that when a man trusts God for some good to come, God is not less but more than His creature's thought about Him.

To Jesus the whole Old Testament was not equally and indiscriminately dear; at least, some words were to be printed in capitals. And yet in every part He saw God speaking to His children, and drawing out their hearts so that they tried feebly and stammeringly to speak to Him. It was all sacred, but of much of it He made no use. Like a master He passed through the great armouries and treasure-houses of the Old Testament, rich with the memorials of the past, and He chose for Himself what was worthiest. He had His favourite texts, like—'I will have mercy and not sacrifice'; He had His favourite books—Deuteronomy, and the later Isaiah, and some of the Psalms. Remember—Jesus did not fulfil the prophecy by riding into Jerusalem on an ass, for it would have been fulfilled as perfectly if, in His lowliness He had *walked* into the city. For the prophet's eyes were fastened not on the beast but on the King, gentle, humble, and yet irresistible. That is the substance, the rest is drapery. But for the people's sake, to catch and compel their attention, mere drapery may have value; and Jesus availed Himself of it that they might understand that honour was being done to an old dream of the heart of men. For it was so that Jesus conceived of His own mission—to meet men in the desire and effort and hope of their hearts.

But as soon as their minds were turned to Zechariah's prophecy, one thought confronted them. 'Rejoice greatly,' said the prophet; and Jesus Christ, riding into the city, was consciously offering Himself to the people as a source of gladness. Jesus, who had in Himself a springing fountain of pure gladness, was grieved by the manifold gloom of the life of men. He heard men saying, 'Who will show us any good?' They had sought it in many quarters. They had blamed the conditions of their nation, and had hoped much from political change; they had blamed the forms of religion and had put real heart into the work of amending these. But still the world's need of joy remained. No tidings could be more welcome than that one day God would give them that; and now, says Jesus, it has come. 'He that drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; it shall be in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life.' 'There is no book,' says Renan, 'which has dried so many tears as the New Testament;' and that man has not seen Jesus Christ, as He wished to be seen, who has not heard Him say, 'Rejoice, rejoice greatly.'

¶ In *The Celestial Surgeon*, Robert Louis Stevenson rightly prayed that God might stab the spirit wide awake

> If I have faltered more or less
> In my great task of happiness.

And as Dean Brown, of Yale, has written, 'Goodness is the most interesting and winsome thing on earth. It is the wine of life. It is the poetry of human existence. It is human action set to music and singing the same tune the morning stars sang together in that high hour when all the sons of God shouted for joy.'[1]

2. But, further, Jesus recognized that a great part of human dejection comes from the lack of rule. Man does wrong to man, the strong tread down the weak, and life is spoiled for both. It is there that Ezekiel asked for a king—to give the weak a chance; and in the Old Testament, that spacious book, there is extraordinary wealth of suggestion as to what a king may be. 'A man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land'—one in whose presence there is protection, so that life can grow strong. 'In his days shall the righteous flourish,' for there have been governments whose fostering care was extended mainly to knaves. 'He shall come down like rain on the grass,' benignant, reviving, so that a life cut down to the very root, and sore and torn and naked, begins to feel the rising of new sap and the promise of fresh shoots. There is a high, Divine benefit in the gift of a right king. We live by reverence and obedience. It is a disastrous life in which a man finds nothing greater or more authoritative than himself, no peak upon his horizon to raise and quicken dreams. There is no rest of heart until we know a power and a wisdom and a care beyond our own. Only when a man can say, 'The Lord is my shepherd,' is there rest for him. 'Thy King cometh,' says the prophet; and Jesus offered Himself to every soul along the noisy streets.

But this is a kingship of a definite sort; and Jesus, in every detail of His array, sought to make its nature emphatic. He knew how men are influenced by show, and that the mere pageant of authority will command the homage of many; but He did not, therefore, seek them for Himself, for a kingdom which rests on such supports was not, in His view, worth founding. Pageant and display have their lawful part in the life of an empire; but the rulers whose hold upon their people has been strongest, like Frederick of Prussia and Victoria of Britain, have dispensed almost wholly with them. What is mightiest is what lies below the surface, and Jesus would not win men's faith by spectacle.

Two ways there are in history of gaining power: there is the way of compulsion, by which whole nations may be overrun and added to the conqueror's dominion. That is the rapid way. But there is the other way—of winning minds by the powers of truth and patience.

¶ Pascal sets side by side the great conquerors and Archimedes, who fought no battles, and did nothing to attract attention, but whose discoveries live and serve the world of men: 'Ah,' says Pascal, 'though he did not catch the eye, how he blazed out before the mind!'

Speak, History; Who are life's victors? Unroll thy long annals and say
Are they those whom the world called the victors, who won the success of a day;
The Martyrs or Nero? The Spartans who fell at Thermopylæ's tryst,
Or the Persians and Xerxes? His Judges or Socrates, Pilate or Christ?

That is a lesson which, however slowly, men are learning, as they see that the work of the thinker and investigator affects the life of nations far more permanently than the most brilliant feats of war. 'Wisdom does not strive nor cry, nor cause her voice to be heard in the streets;' without strife or noise of words, by the persuasion of truth, by ways as silent and as irresistible as the working of leaven, Wisdom still makes her way.

¶ In the French Revolution a military mob, armed to the teeth and mowing down all who stood in their way, came suddenly upon a white-haired old man, dignified and with real goodness written upon his face, who advanced unruffled to meet them. At once their leader flung up his hand, 'Citizens,' he cried, 'this is De La Eure, and sixty years of pure life is about to address you.' Then a miracle happened. That riotous crowd fell silent and stood still, while the old man proceeded to persuade them to adopt more moderate methods.[1]

3. In this symbolic action Jesus not only declared His thought about Himself, He deliberately challenged men to declare their thought. On this occasion He did what He never did before or after. He was surrounded

[1] W. R. Bowie, *The Inescapable Christ*, 126.

[1] D. C. Mitchell, *The Nonsense of Neutrality*, 109.

by men who talked and thought a great deal about Messiah's coming, and who professed enthusiasm for it. The words were often on their lips; the hope, they said, was in their hearts; but Jesus, who knew the snare and the delusion of words, searched their profession to the bottom. Like an actor, but in deep and sorrowful solemnity, He dressed Himself to play His part before their eyes. He was close to the city and did not need to ride; but He halted on His way, and sent two of the disciples to borrow a young ass from a friend. And then, with the crowd growing denser about Him, He paced up the slopes and in at the gate. 'You say you are longing for Messiah's coming; you say that you look for Him to come to His capital riding on an ass; it has a good sound in the words of it, but here is the thing—such a King as the prophet spoke of—how do you like it now?' And what had seemed fascinating and credible, when it was found on the page of a sacred book, lost all its charm when it was seen in flesh. That was Christ's challenge and its result.

Will you also go away? Jesus Christ passes through our society to-day and tests us as He did the Jews. There is no appeal which searches the heart more closely than this; do we, in the end of the day, believe in truth? He said, 'No sign shall be given you but the sign of Jonah,' a man who arrives in a city alone, cast up by the sea, weatherbeaten and uncommended, and whose only allies are the message which he hears and the natural, human conscience. That is My sign, said Jesus.[1]

The Beauty of Praise

Luke xix. 37, 40.—'The whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God. . . . If these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.'

The entry of Christ into Jerusalem, as it marked an epoch in Israel's visitation, also signalized a change in the manner in which the Lord had borne Himself toward the people. Hitherto He had been solicitous to avoid publicity; now He invited it. Hitherto He had laid restrictions upon even grateful hearts that they should tell no man of what He had done for them; now, however, He declared that if men withheld their praise from Him, the very stones would cry out.

He took, also, the children, who probably did not think much about it at the time, under His protection in the Temple, and said to those who blamed Him: 'Have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?'

Hark! how the children shrill and high
Hosanna cry;
Their joys provoke the distant skie,
Where thrones and Seraphins reply;
And their own Angels shine and sing,
In a bright ring:
Such yong, sweet mirth
Makes heaven and earth
Joyn in a joyful symphony.[1]

Jesus wished to be praised thus; He Himself planned to be thus solemnly met—for He sent for the ass, and made His entry riding on it. And so it is still. Jesus desires, at all times and in all places, to be praised by His people.

Let us ask, first: How are we to praise? secondly: Why must we praise? thirdly: What end does praise serve?

1. How are we to honour and praise our Lord, as He rejoiced in being praised on the last Sunday of His life? How shall we show Him what reverence and love we feel for Him? We can show Him this with any of the goods and gifts that we possess, if only our gift comes from the heart and redounds to His honour. Their gifts took many forms even in those days. One gave his ass; others offered their outer garments, and allowed them to be trodden underfoot. All raised their voices in spite of the prudent people who shook their heads. And there were other ways, too, in which He was praised. Jesus was sitting at table the night before at Bethany. Mary, the sister of Lazarus, took a box of costly ointment, anointed His feet with it, and dried them with her hair, and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. And Martha, too, honoured Him aright while serving, and this time she was not blamed, as once before, for she left her sister, so different in nature, to take her own way. The gifts that each possessed and offered to the Lord were different; but it was *one* spirit of reverence and love that presented the

[1] W. M. Macgregor, *Jesus Christ the Son of God*, 77.

[1] Vaughan.

sacrifices which were a joy and refreshment to our Lord on His path of suffering.

But the thought may come to us: 'If I had seen Him, the Man mighty in word and deed, the most lovable of men, pure and sinless, incomparably great, then my heart would have beat at the sight of Him. Most certainly I should not have been missing from among His followers, when it was a question of honouring Him. But now I am far from Him, and He is far from me. It is so long ago since He was upon earth, it is not surprising that hearts have grown cold towards Him.'

Do we, then, know more of the great and the little men of our time than we do of Jesus? It is possible that we may know their outward form and dress better, the sound of their voices and the glance of their eyes. But their innermost being, the deepest thoughts and affections of their hearts, are often quite hidden from us.

> I tell you, we are fooled by the eye, the ear;
> These organs muffle us from that real world
> That lies about us.

Jesus said words, did deeds, and suffered pain which even now lay bare, to the simplest human being, His innermost thoughts and feelings, and thus we become conscious of such a harmonious life that we cannot doubt its reality. All that we have seen and heard of Jesus makes us believe in Him—the greatest One who has ever been seen in the world.

We must not allow ourselves to be kept back by the thought that our acquaintance with Jesus is too superficial, our knowledge of His Being far too imperfect, or that there is much in His words and deeds that is incomprehensible to us. The people who greeted the Lord so joyously on Palm Sunday had no very clear and perfect knowledge of His Person or of His work. They would have fared badly, if they had been examined in their profession of faith, and yet Jesus rejoiced in their praise.

There may have been much ignorance and also trust in works of righteousness in all that our fathers did to the glory of the Saviour in the Middle Ages, and yet it bears witness to the kingly power of Jesus over the hearts of men. The glorious cathedrals which they built, the costly garments and carpets which they wove and embroidered, the pictures they painted, the statues they carved, the songs and melodies some of which are still sung in our Evangelical Churches—all are Palm Sunday works with which the Lord is well pleased. Let any one who cannot do anything of the same kind help others to whom God has given special gifts; or let him sing the hymns which have been sung before us by others; but he must do it from the heart and only to the glory of Jesus Christ. Even if one should be born deaf, dumb, and blind, yet he could still follow the Apostle's injunction: 'Sing in your hearts to the Lord.'

¶ Knowing but little of the Kaffir language as yet, Arnot found that he was shut up to 'converse only with Him whose ear is ever open to us. This,' Arnot says, 'has turned my solitude into a precious time, and I can say to His praise that I never felt more free from all care and anxious thought than now. I wonder how it is that Satan has so managed to blindfold me in the past, that my whole life has not been one note of praise. Oh! stir up every child of God you meet to praise our God more. We little know how much we rob Him by our sad hearts and dull, thankless lives.'[1]

> Let praise devote thy work and skill employ
> Thy whole mind, and thy heart be lost in joy.
> Well-doing bringeth pride, this constant thought
> Humility, that thy best done is naught.
> Man doeth nothing well, be it great or small,
> Save to praise God; but that hath savèd all:
> For God requires no more than thou hast done,
> And takes thy work to bless it for His own.[2]

2. Is the answer to the question, 'Why must we praise?' still needed? If on that day any one had asked the people who hailed the Lord why they shouted so loudly, they would have looked at the questioner in amazement. The answer which the Lord Himself gave for His friends was: 'If men were as senseless and dumb as stones, God could create men out of stones, who would have hearts for the Son of Man, and mouths to speak His praise.' And all others who since then have acted thus or in some similar way, when asked why they did it have only been able to answer: 'That which filled our hearts needed an outlet. Our inner and also our outer life would soon become poverty-stricken and barren, if our daily round were not now and then interrupted by a Hosanna from our very hearts.' It is, as is said in the

[1] E. Baker, *F. S. Arnot*, 24. [2] Robert Bridges.

old prayer, used at the Lord's Supper, 'very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should give thanks at all times and in all places.' Yea, it is not only meet and right, but also for our own good, if we often thus allow ourselves to be filled and uplifted with holy joy.

Any one who has realized and experienced something of the invincible power of goodness which has come to us through our Lord Jesus, who for our sakes humbled Himself even unto death, will be unable to hold his peace; he must hail Him as the King of His community. We do so because we cannot help it, and we will not leave off, because it is for our own good. Love becomes young again, faith grows, and hope waxes strong, when they proclaim and set themselves forth in all kinds of actions that are well pleasing to God and man.

3. Thus we have already *one* answer to our last question: 'What end does it serve to praise and glorify God in all our words and works?' But there is another answer to be found in the Gospel. When our Lord Himself sent word to the owner of the ass, 'The Lord hath *need* of him,' this it was that above all else glorified that day of the entry into Jerusalem; and this applies also to all that we can do and provide, in order that we may honour Him as our King. The Lord needs all, though not indeed for Himself. The Lord needs our joyful songs of praise and all the visible proofs of the reverence and love for Him of which we are capable, that He may find an entrance to the hearts of those who are Christian only in name, who do not yet know Him, or know Him no longer. If our Lord declared that the shouts of the children in the Temple had power to overcome His enemies, of how much greater value must be the Hosannas of men and women?

Preaching and teaching are not the only ways of winning subjects for Jesus, the King. We must all praise God in our daily lives, and in all that is lovely and of good repute. If we wish to serve Him when He needs our service, if we wish to help Him in again finding an entrance to His people, then we dare not look surly and gloomy before other men. We must carry all our cares and wants to the Heavenly Father in prayer, and walk before men with our heads raised and with joyful faces. We must let men see that He whom we serve is a great King, and that there is no higher honour or greater joy than serving and honouring Him with heart and lips, with soul and body.

¶ It is this thought that Browning brings out in 'Pippa Passes.' The little Italian girl, a silk-worker in a factory, has a holiday—her one holiday in the year—and for sheer gladness she goes out singing a song. But it was a song of faith, 'God's in His heaven.' And as she went along the street all unconscious of anything but her own glad heart and the loving goodness of God, the words and music floated into casements here and there and changed lives at critical moments. There were two people living in sin whose hearts were awakened to clean shame and real hunger for goodness. They touched the soul of an artist who was about to give himself up to an angry passion, and set him free. They reached the heart of an anarchist who had made up his mind to kill the king, and stirred his buried patriotism. And the girl went home and slept her sleep, unconscious of what her song had done and her spirit had wrought by bringing to people a message that suggested God.[1]

The Two Weepings

Luke xix. 41.—'He beheld the city, and wept over it.'
John xi. 35.—'Jesus wept.'

THERE are but two occasions in the Gospels on which we light upon our Saviour weeping—once at the grave of a man who was His friend: once when Jerusalem spread out before Him. And both, not in the earlier days of youth, when the human heart is susceptible and quivering, but in the later season, when the Cross was near. Goethe confesses in his autobiography that as he grew older he lost the power of tears, and there are many men who, as experience gathers, are conscious of a hardening like that. But our Saviour, to the last moment that He lived, was quick and quivering to joy and sorrow.

There are tears in the world, bitter and scalding tears, which are wrung out by personal affliction; tears of anguish, of intense corporeal anguish; tears caused by cruelty or mockery. But the point to be ever observed is that our Lord, though He suffered intensely in all such ways as that, never, so far as we read, was moved to tears. He was laughed to scorn—He of the

[1] J. Reid, *The Victory of God*, 279.

sensitive heart—yet it is not then we read that Jesus wept. He was spat upon and scourged and crucified; but it is not then we light upon Him weeping. And even in the Garden of Gethsemane, where great drops were falling to the ground, drops which would have looked like tears to any prying child among the olives, Scripture tells us, as with a note of warning, lest we should misinterpret what was happening there, that they were not tears, but drops of sweat and blood. The tears of our Lord were not wrung out by suffering, however intense and cruel it might be. On the only two occasions when we read of them they are the tears of a Divine compassion.

If we take these two occasions on which the weeping of Jesus is recorded, we shall notice that there are striking differences between them.

1. On the former occasion our Lord's tears were shed for *one*, and on the latter His tears were shed for *many*. Jesus wept beside the grave of Lazarus, for one single solitary friend; for a man who had loved Him with a great devotion, and given Him always a welcome in his home. There is no such human touch in all the Gospels, nothing that so betrays the heart of Christ, as to be simply told that Jesus wept when He went out to stand before the grave of Lazarus. Here is a heart that has known the power of friendship, that has known the infinite solace of the *one*; a heart more deeply moved when that one dies than by all the cruelties which men can hurl at Him. And then, having learned His infinite compassion for those who have had one heart to love and lose, we read that Jesus wept *over the city*. Tears for the one; tears for the twice ten thousand; how typical is that of the Redeemer! Never was there a compassion so discriminative, and never a compassion so inclusive.

¶ There are men who can be touched by personal sympathy; they have heart, but they cannot take a comprehensive view and embrace a noble cause—they fail in mind. Others have their imagination fired by a cause, but they cannot sympathize with a wounded heart. We have narrow good men, and we have iron-hearted philanthropists. Christ takes in the tender heart and comprehensive thought—the person and the cause—the woman's way of looking at it and the man's.

Or look at it in another way. He sympathizes with suffering and sorrow—a bruised heart; and He weeps over sin—a blinded heart. Christianity alone has set these two forth—it is our glory and our duty—and in One Person; the tenderness of the human with the comprehensiveness of the divine.[1]

2. The next difference which impresses us is this—and it is a suggestive and profound distinction—it is that the former tears were shed for *death*, and the latter tears were shed for *life*. There was something in the death of Lazarus which made a profound impression upon Christ. He was troubled; He groaned in spirit; He wept. Often He had been face to face with death before, with death in some of its most tragic aspects. He had looked on the still cold face of Jairus' daughter, and had seen the anguish of the widow of Nain. Yet it is only now, upon the road at Bethany, that we see the storm and passion of His soul when faced by the awful ravages of death. Now for the first time in His ministry our Lord had lost *a friend*, and it made death gigantic and appalling. Death had come home to Him, and in that hour He realized, as never before, how utterly cruel was the last great enemy. It was then He wept for all that death had done, and all that death was doing, in the world. And so these tears of His are sacramental of all the sorrow of the aching heart, when the place is empty, and the grave is tenanted, and the familiar voice is silent.

Now, with that dark and dreary scene let us contrast the other scene. It is a city shimmering in beauty under the radiance of a Sunday morning. Children are playing in the market-place—women are singing as they rock the cradle; men are at business and regiments are marching—there is movement and there is music everywhere. Friends are meeting who have not met for years, for Passover was the great season of reunion, and eyes are bright and hearts are beating bravely in the gladness of these old ties re-knit. Out on the Bethany road there had been *death*; here in the teeming city there was *life*. And we read that, as He looked, He wept. They were not tears for death, but tears for life; tears of Divine compassion for the living; tears for the might-have-been—the vanity—the awful judgment that

[1] J. Ker, *Thoughts for Heart and Life*, 148.

was yet to be; tears for the living who have gone astray, and who are hungering for peace and have missed it, and who have had their opportunity and failed.

The Son of God in tears
The angels wondering see:
Hast thou no wonder, O my soul?
He shed those tears for thee!

He wept that we might weep,
Might weep our sin and shame,
He wept to shew His love for us,
And bid us love the same.

Then tender be our hearts,
Our eyes in sorrow dim,
Till every tear from every eye
Is wiped away by Him! [1]

There is a sorrow deeper than sorrow for the dead—it is the sorrow for the living; and it is much to know that Jesus understood it. The bitterest sorrow has no grave to stand at, no sepulchre to adorn with opening flowers. The bitterest sorrow does not spring from death: it springs from that mystery which we call life; and Jesus felt it to His depths.

3. Let us point out one other difference that stands out very clearly in the Scripture. The former tears were such as others shared in: the latter were tears that no one understood. Read that chapter in the Gospel of John again, and you find that Christ was not alone in weeping. Martha and Mary were there, and they were weeping also; and the Jews who had known Lazarus, and loved him. There was a kinship in a common sorrow there, a fellow-feeling which united hearts, a sense of common loss and ache and loneliness. Now turn to the other scene, and what a difference! It is a pageantry of enthusiastic gladness. The cry goes ringing along the country road. 'Hosanna to the Son of David.' And it is amid these shouting voices, of men beside themselves with wild enthusiasm, that, the Scripture tells us, Jesus wept.

In this our mortal life there are common griefs, touches of nature which make the whole world kin. But how endlessly true is the old saying of Scripture, that the heart knoweth its own bitterness. And in those bitternesses which words can never utter, and which lie too deep for any human help, what a comfort to know that our Saviour understands! In all the common sorrows of humanity He is our brother, and He weeps with us. He stands beside the grave of Lazarus still, clothed in the beauty of His resurrection. But in that lonely unutterable sorrow, which is the price and the penalty of personality, we may be sure He understands us also.

[1] H. F. Lyte, *Poems*, 82.

Christ and the City

Luke xix. 41.—'He beheld the city, and wept over it.'

A GREAT city is very much more than the mere sum of all its individual inhabitants. Take them one by one, and they do not move us much. We may even regard them individually with a certain contempt. They do not compare favourably, perhaps, with the dwellers in villages, with the tillers of the field. But the city is vastly more than the sum of its inhabitants. The city has a life of its own, and a character, and a power for good or evil, and a destiny—all of its own. Our love for it, our dislike of it, our pride in it, our sorrow for it, is quite independent of our feelings about the individuals who live in it, who really compose it. The city is itself an entity: it lives, and sins, and suffers, and dies; it moves us to wrath, or absorbs all our sympathies; it is (as our Lord said) exalted to heaven or cast down to hell; and this, all by itself, and all independently of any person or persons in particular. The city is alive, as a city; it lives and is full of energy; it is beautiful, it is frightful, it is passionately loved, it carries people out of themselves with joy or sorrow, with pleasure or pain. It is the most wonderful thing in the world.

¶ In reading the history of the past—the history of great cities like Venice, Florence, and Athens—we observe much of what we now describe as civic patriotism and pride. Men thought of their city as having a personal life, as a creature with a soul to be loved, and not merely as so many miles of streets and crowds of people. We have only to read the Hebrew Psalms and the writings of the prophets to see how the Jews personified and idealized Jerusalem, thought about it, spoke about it, as if

it had an existence apart from themselves, endowed with a greater, larger, more enduring life. When devout souls of that olden time thought of Heaven, it was as a New Jerusalem they conceived and pictured it. Love for a city surely never reached a higher point than that. A new Birmingham, a new Liverpool, a new Glasgow, a new Paris, a new London, would not be a very pathetic and impressive description of Heaven to many of us, but a New Jerusalem satisfied the aspirations of the Hebrew soul.[1]

Our Saviour weeping over Jerusalem recognized this great fact. 'Jerusalem' lived for Him: not, of course, apart from its individual inhabitants, but still in a sense *above* them, with a greater, fuller, more affecting, and more permanent life, than the mere sum of their lives. Jesus weeping over Jerusalem has justified our profound interest in cities as cities; in their sufferings, their joys, their fate.

1. He is still the same, the very same—yesterday, to-day, yea, for ever. Still He comes near, does this Eternal Christ, who has never left the world into which He was born, comes near and beholds the city, and beholds, generally, to weep. Some people, when they think of London, are filled with pride—almost with boastful pride; it is to them the greatest and richest city in the world. Others, when thinking of it, exult in its power, for it is the centre of the world's commerce and the beating heart of the world's busy life. Others again, when they think of it, are moved to admiration of the beauty of its great buildings and the treasures of art which it contains. Others, again, are almost terrified by its vastness. 'London is an awful place,' said a Scotsman; 'full of life and death.' And others yet again are burdened and harassed by the terrific and heart-breaking problems of London's poor and unemployed. Pride, triumph, anxiety, fear: great London inspires all these feelings in the breasts of those who contemplate it. But when Jesus beholds London, He weeps over it.

It is the whole city He weeps over. He sees it all—its marred manhood, its unhappy homes, its depleting temples. He sees its poverty, its intemperance, its impurity. He sees the social sin. Poverty that produces drunkenness. Drunkenness that pauperizes men. Poverty and drunkenness producing impurity. Poverty, drunkenness, impurity, co-operating to create the curse of crime. In the overcrowding that arises from drunkenness and poverty, morality is practically impossible, and many children, like Oliver Twist in Fagin's den, are educated in the school of crime.

2. But Christ not only weeps over the city; He calls men to share His compassion. He not only climbs the mount of ethical ideal, and the mount from which the ideal is seen to be perverted. He climbs another mount, the mount of sacrifice—Calvary! He suffers when men sin, suffers to put away sin, and there is no sort of salvation anywhere without sacrifice—His sacrifice and ours.

We shall do no good in our fight against sin, we shall show no earnestness and meet with no success in our efforts to grapple with indifference, until we enter into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings and feel the awfulness of sin sufficiently to make us weep for it. We read of some in the old Book who 'sighed and who cried' for the sin of the city. We read of David Brainerd feeling the burden of his poor Indians to such a degree that the agony of his prayers on their behalf left him weak and physically prostrate at the end. We read of Hudson Taylor so oppressed by the thought of China's millions living in ignorance and sin that his physical health broke down beneath the strain. When we feel the case of the city lying like a burden on our souls, when we realize the true condition of those who are without God, when we are sufficiently concerned for their condition to weep for them, there will be an end to our ease and complacency and indifference. We shall all of us be fired with a holy 'passion for souls.'

¶ Here is what a writer says of that great citizen of Liverpool—Philip Rathbone. 'Only those who knew him could understand the positive passion he cherished for Liverpool. There was something in him of the old Hebrew's fiercely tender devotion to Jerusalem when he sang—"They shall prosper that love thee." I should never have felt it cant upon his lips had he broken out in such words as—"Peace be within thy walls and prosperity within thy palaces." It was his dream to see Liverpool—his city by the sea—as majestic in her architecture as ever was Venice or Genoa; but in his passion for his city he wanted not only

[1] J. Hunter, *God and Life*, 278.

prosperity and art and beauty, but a race of men and women who should be types to the world of nobility and honour and grace.'

I think this is the authentic sign and seal
Of Godship, that it ever waxes glad,
And more glad, until gladness blossoms, bursts
Into a rage to suffer for mankind.[1]

If Thou Hadst Known

Luke xix. 41, 42.—'And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.'

What a pathetic scene is here recalled to our imagination! The gay and careless city smiling in the sunlight, with eager crowds of busy men, full of their interests and pleasures, full of their great religious celebration about to be kept—and the Saviour looking down on it all, weeping. A wave of excitement like that which had transported the disciples could not blind Him to the actual facts of the case. He knew that He had lived, and would die, in vain, so far as that hard and proud capital was concerned. He knew that He was rejected of rulers and people; and that ears and hearts were deaf to His message. As He looked at the beautiful city it was not with pride but with anguish. What a history of Divine grace was represented there within these walls, the long story of God's love and patience—and its failure!

Had'st thou but known—at least in this thy day—
Wherein thy safety and thy welfare lay,
Thou had'st not to thy foes thus fall'n a prey,
Had'st thou but known.

Had'st thou but known the occasion waiting thee,
Which ne'er again might so propitious be,
Thou would'st have grasped thine opportunity
Had'st thou but known.

Had'st thou but known Who stood thy gate before,
And waited patient at the close-barred door,
Wet with the falling dews, the night frost hoar!
Had'st thou but known.[2]

[1] Browning. [2] W. Hall.

1. *If thou hadst known!*—It was, as we clearly see now, the day of their visitation, a day of grace, when they might have laid deep the true foundations of a strong national life, and when they might have made their own lives rich with spiritual contents. Jesus had been teaching the way of life, the way of God for man. He had pointed them to the inward source of all strength and joy and peace both for the nation and for individuals. He showed them that the one weakness of a nation is sin, and the one bondage of a man is sin. They refused to listen to the things that really belonged to their peace, and looked for it in their own schemes. Their political ideals never went farther than what ministered to national vanity and empty pride of race. Factional strife and partisan feeling, with petty plans all bounded by revolt against the yoke of Rome. Their religious ideals were similar, all external in aim, looking for the establishment of a Kingdom of God in the form of a Jewish world-empire. Christ's word could not even be understood by them when He said, 'The kingdom of heaven is within you.' They rejected His teaching and rejected Himself, and did not know that they were refusing their one and only hope. It was judicial blindness, the result of a long course of moral perversity. Our Lord's lament was the same as the prophet's lament to their fathers, with the same passion and pity, 'O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments: then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea.'

2. *If thou hadst known!*—We too have a day of grace, a day of sweet and hopeful visitation. There are things that belong to our peace, and they are the same things as ever. There can be in us the same judicial blindness, the same moral perversity that hid them from the eyes of the Jews of old. Can the Divine love look down on us with anything else than tears, as we pour out the treasures of our hearts on things that profit nothing, as we blunderingly and yet wilfully pursue our foolish courses?

How we mistake the things that really belong to our peace, the things that alone count! Young men and young women say, 'Keep on amusing me and I shall have peace. It is drudgery and sameness and compulsory toil that worry me. Fill up my life with

pleasant change and my heart will be at peace.' To others, that medicine seems a very quack remedy. According to them, it is turmoil that breeds restlessness. 'Give us,' say they, 'peaceable surroundings and we shall be peaceable. Give us a home into which the sunlight and the singing of birds come in the morning; give us a garden wherein roses grow; take from us the dreary round of well-nigh hopeless work; give us, in its place, opportunity to serve, according to our faculties, such good works as may appeal to us; take from us anxiety as to ways and means, and we shall be content. In peaceful homes, we shall possess our souls in peace.' May God inspire legislators and economic thinkers and workers to devise plans whereby true 'garden cities' shall deck our land! At the same time, we all agree that not thus can the permanent rest of the soul be found.

And many another cure is proposed by men after their type. 'Give me the life of thought,' says one; 'of art,' says another; 'of power and satisfied ambition,' says a third, 'therein is my rest.' Sometimes a base voice comes, 'Give me my lusts, and I shall rest.'

Is it not the plainest fact of common experience that not along any of these lines does rest come to abide? The pleasures that youth grasps at are often ashes in the mouth to later years.

¶ 'Do you think,' said Byron to the doctor who attended him in his last illness—'do you think I care for life? I am heartily sick of it. Few men have lived faster than I have done. I have known pleasure under every form. I have drunk up all the nectar in the cup of life. It is time to throw the dregs away.'

Ambition fails the moment ambition is gratified. Many a man has felt just what Henry Martyn felt when he obtained the high position of Senior Wrangler—he had grasped a shadow. Any one who has earnestly striven for a position and has won it knows what a bauble it is the moment it lies in his hand. He must immediately seek some new thing; and if, like Alexander, he finds no new world at hand to conquer, like Alexander he shall weep. Even the fine life of the mind itself does not satisfy; for the thinker, just like other folk, has a heart and a soul. These things do not belong to our peace: they do not belong to our *selves*.

We can see this clearly and convincingly if we ask what they will mean for us at the last. 'What will ye do in the end thereof?' asks the prophet, and surely it is a pertinent and a reasonable question. Things that have no place and no value when viewed in the light of eternity cannot be among those things that belong to our peace. If we have no life of the soul, no reach into the unseen, no citizenship in heaven, no intercourse with the spiritual world, no sympathy even with things eternal, then in spite of all our getting and striving and learning we shall be at the last poor and naked and blind and miserable, though we know it not now.

3. *If thou hadst known!*—What vain regrets many a man has at the end of life that he should have been blind to the things that alone count. Many a man has wished he might live over again that he might undo the past and let the important things have their due proportion in his life. Sometimes the remorse has been despair, not merely the cry of ignorance which says, 'If only I had known!' but the cry of anguish for opportunities that have been wilfully lost, for a blindness that has been moral perversity.

> When vain desire at last and vain regret
> Go hand in hand to death and all is vain,
> What shall assuage the unforgotten pain
> And teach the unforgetful to forget?

4. *If thou hadst known!*—But we should know; we can know. Our hearts tell us that the things that belong to our peace are not the things we are striving for and sinning for. We may be suffering from the judicial blindness which hides the better part from our eyes. We too may be despising or neglecting the time of our visitation; but the sands have not yet all run out. Be sure it is a time of visitation, a day of grace, the day of the Lord. And He summons us to a new life with other ambitions and desires and hopes. If we go with Him, if we live with Him, if we make our home in the things of the spirit, we shall not be, at the last, tortured with vain desires and vain regrets.

Things Missed

Luke xix. 41, 42.—'And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.'

John iv. 10.—'Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.'

The great things in life do not strive or cry as they come near; they move in gentleness. They can be missed with ease. The Samaritan woman did not know that the opportunity of her life had come as she spoke with a tired and thirsty man. The supreme chance was unveiling itself in a commonplace incident: she was the entreated, the benefactress. What was there in the matter to suggest a possible reversal of parts? Yet if the interview had ended at this point, what recollection but of loss and failure could have filled this woman's mind? The thing would not have borne dwelling on. It would have meant that she had been near the Saviour of men, and He had been hid from her eyes.

With the city it was different: it was not the climax of a short interview that men missed here; it was the chance that a continuous ministry gave. Often had He invited them to Himself; often had He warned them. In vain. The whole ministry had been their opportunity and they had missed its import. They had seen neither His greatness nor the greatness of their own chances. Blind to blessing; oblivious of opportunity.

1. These New Testament incidents speak clearly of the almost disguised, incognito fashion in which life's chances come. The incidents seem to suggest the partially veiled character of the great moments of life; the conjunction between opportunity and obliviousness, and the penalty of obtuseness.

What an opportunity! What would some men and women of to-day not give for a chance of speaking to Christ in the flesh? It may be a weak longing, yet many weary sometimes of Faith's struggle to maintain its hold on the unseen—long for a message from God through the senses. It is so even of others than the Christ. A great agnostic writer puts this into the mouth of one of his characters, who longs to know if his dead mother, from whom he parted in a cloud of misunderstanding, had forgiven him: 'If we who remain alive were only allowed to hold conversation with the dead—just once, a bare minute, even through a screen of iron bars as with persons in prison—what we might learn.' If that is so with men like ourselves, what of intercourse with the Man? To be able like John to say, 'We beheld the Life,' 'Our hands handled the Life,' 'We have heard and we have seen the Life.' This opportunity was given to a woman of Samaria. It was the great hour of her history and she came near missing it.

It was great because she was in the presence of Him who knew what she supremely needed to know. She had her thoughts about God and worship, about religious exclusions and separations, about sacred things and persons and places; and away in the background and at the bottom of her mind, lay the thought of the willing wrong she had done. She could interest herself in other things superficially as a person can who has an incurable disease. The past had some ugly stains—still one had to go on living. There were yet many matters of real, if of minor interest; and there was the perpetual, religious dispute—which you did not need to be religious to take part in. And beside her there was the Son of man who had power on earth to forgive sins. 'Well, I know Messiah is coming. When He arrives He will explain it all to us.' She does not know, but will know in a minute, that this revealer of the soul to itself is beside her.

The august marvel of the Gospel consists less in its scheme of things—though that excites angelic wonder—than in the fact that in and through the message a personal presence touches us. It is not a competing theory with other theories; it is the vehicle by which the living mind and heart of Jesus Christ operate upon the world. It is asserted again and again in the New Testament that Christ goes with His message and His messengers. 'There am I in the midst of them.' 'The Lord working with them and confirming the word with signs following.' It is this that makes the greatness of all real spiritual opportunity.

¶ How does Mrs Taylor describe the change that came to Pastor Hsi? 'Picture then this proud Confucianist, this opium-smoking scholar, with all his sad dark past, his heart hunger, his

disappointed ambitions, his bondage to sin, brought near to Christ, the living Christ, for the first time?' What had happened? He had gone to live in the home of David Hill, and through this human messenger the spiritual Christ came to him.

2. Yet so often there is obliviousness. 'If thou knewest . . . but thou didst not know,' must be said in the case of many. 'If thou hadst known, even thou in this thy day' (the special opportunity made for thee), 'the things that belong to thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes.'

Opportunity calls for awareness, capacity to see it. When Ishmael seemed to be dying of thirst there was a spring near, but the eyes of Hagar were blind with tears; she never saw it till the Lord opened them. The thing most needed and desired may be close to us.

¶ Sir John Murray, the famous oceanographer, says that 'in the equatorial regions of each ocean there is a band of comparatively fresh water, and fresh zones surround the melting ice in the Arctic and Antarctic regions. Where rivers enter the ocean the lighter river-water tends to float on the surface, and its freshening influence may be detected at great distances from the land. . . .' A vessel in old sailing days once ran short of water. It was hailed by another, and request was made by it for water. The answer was, 'Do you not know where you are? You are in the Amazon.' They were sailing in fresh water and did not know it.

Master of human destinies am I,
Both fame and fortune on my footsteps wait,
I knock unbidden once at each man's gate.
If sleeping wake, if feasting rise
Before I turn away.
It is the hour of fate.

3. But missing and mistaking things are acts of omission that are penalized. 'Now,' Christ said, 'are they hid from thine eyes.' Not by any other Divine decree than the decree which makes neglect to be punished by loss of power. Mark how, in strong examples, experience speaks. There is the figure of a man who has never fed his mind. He had faculties once, but he has lived on mental pastry or worse; and the time most surely comes when a book worth reading not merely *does* not interest him, but *could* not.

¶ An American once stormed through one of the great European galleries of art. He sniffed at this picture an instant; he sniffed an instant at that; and then he stormed out. But before he went he turned on the venerable attendant at the door and said: 'Not a thing here worth seeing—not a thing!' To which the attendant replied, 'If you please, sir, these pictures are no longer on trial—the spectators are.'

That dull-eyed visitor doubtless was a very busy man. He had started with normal capacities to appreciate the finest gifts of life, but, preoccupied with many tasks, he had lost through atrophy the power to love the highest when he saw it.[1]

Or there is the too familiar, pitiable figure of a man whose dearest desire has come to be alcohol. Perhaps he began the excess and abuse of it directly to obtain peace. Now, his thoughts are ever turning to it. As he speaks, he would hurry to be off to drink. And though he does it, he knows it now to be not the peace-bringer, but the instrument of a continuous restlessness. So with the man who possesses the sins of his youth; so with the gold-grabber; so with the power-luster. It is too late to seek other avenues of peace. Desire for them is dead. Such men are chained to their own restlessness; and from them breaks the most desolate cry which can be wrung from a human soul, 'If I had known, if I had known, the things that belong unto my peace.'

God offers to all the family of men the gift of peace, He offers it to men of business, fretted with anxiety likely enough, to women with the care and delight of children, and, above all, to young men and maidens in the hey-day of youth—to all, young and old alike. But this peace is to be found only along the avenue of goodness and of true search for God.

The Cleansing of The Temple

Luke xix. 45, 46.—'And he went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought; Saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves.'

Looked at from the common point of view, that Jesus cared nothing for the external expression of religion, this incident is both

[1] H. E. Fosdick, *Twelve Tests of Character*, 11.

unexpected and perplexing. According to that view, Jesus was the preacher of a merely inward religion and an entirely invisible kingdom; He was, therefore, opposed to all forms and ceremonies, regarded all ritual as useless, and was a veritable iconoclast against all sacred places, observances, and outward acts of worship. Yet here we have Him taking part in the reform of a worship which by His own prediction was soon to pass away, in cleansing a Temple which He foresaw was soon to be left without one stone standing upon another, and to be superseded by that spiritual Temple, His Body, built up of men for its living stones. The action that this point of view expects is either a studious avoidance of the Temple altogether, or that He should deal with its vain worship in the spirit of Oliver Cromwell, who, stalking into the parish church at St Ives and finding the parson reading the Book of Common Prayer, commanded him to 'stop that fooling and come down.' On the contrary, Jesus has no word to say against priest or sacrifice, no protest against lights or incense, but only against the irreverence and sacrilege of allowing trading to be carried on even in the outer court of the Temple, which, with the chaffering of merchants and the lowing of beasts, disturbed the worship of the House of God and invaded the sacred precincts with the commerce of every day.

1. This action of Jesus was typical of His character.

(1) The nature of Jesus was one that was easily moved. He felt, and He felt profoundly. The depth of His feeling of compassion is pictured in the bold New Testament speech, in terms for which our language has no polite equivalent. Often His own spirit was so moved within Him that He groaned in anguish. His indignation was capable of a fierceness which left men speechless before Him; and, when He cared to express Himself in condemnation, He left men's characters bare and black as a forest after a fire.

But what is even more astonishing than the depth of feeling in Jesus is the things that moved Him. The presence of suffering, which is as old as the hills, and which in Palestine then, as now, paraded its misery as a commercial asset, stirred Jesus to put forth healing power that taxed His strength to the limit, and strove for an equal place beside His religious teaching. It was His giving Himself to this instead of to some great national action that caused John the Baptist to doubt whether, after all, He was the Messiah. You will remember, too, how the sight of great multitudes or the vision of a great city shook His nature as by a storm; so great was His yearning for the souls of men and His grief at their blindness. It is only because we do not share His mighty conscience that we are amazed at the outburst of righteous wrath to which the Temple profanation stirred Him.

¶ The small cattle-whip does not figure very successfully as a symbol of material force. And does any one seriously suggest that it was by a display of force that He did His deed? The miracle of it lay in the tremendous exhibition of purely *moral* force. Angry men who could have overwhelmed Him immediately by weight of numbers shrank before Conscience as it blazed forth through His eyes.[1]

Abashed the Devil stood,
And felt how awful goodness is.

(2) It is not surprising that He was moved by this. We might collect from the Gospels many indications that Jesus was by no means unconcerned for the due place being given to the reverent observance of religion. The only ritual He ever objected to was that which had been imposed by the Pharisees without authority—the back-garden ritual of tithing mint, anise, and cummin, which tended to make the whole business burdensome and ridiculous. Whenever He contrasted ritual observance with ethical practice, He never dreamed of the modern proposal that the ritual should be dropped; but instead demanded that what it signified should be carried out in conduct. 'This ye ought to have done, and not have left the other undone' sums up His general attitude.

With this general principle in view, His attitude to the profanation of the Temple is quite explicable. Jesus had attended the plain services of the synagogue and had taken an active part in them. That fits in with what many can understand. But when He came to the Temple, where the worship was of a quite different character, the only thing He objected

[1] J. H. Moulton, in *London Quarterly Review*, Jan. 1915, p. 39.

to was that which was out of keeping with the general spirit of the worship. According to Mark, it was not only the selling and buying and the general commercial atmosphere, but the way in which people used that part of the Temple as a right of way, as if it had no more significance than any ordinary street in Jerusalem. It is difficult to see how Jesus could have felt this unless He believed that some special sanctity attached to the Temple and its worship.

His indignation at this carelessness and unseemliness was heightened by the fact that it was the Court of the Gentiles that was given over to this sacrilege. Gentiles were admitted to the Temple area, but only to the outer court; between this and the Holy Place was a barrier on which a notice threatened with death any Gentile who dared to pass beyond. When that part of the Temple in which alone the heathen could worship was treated in this way, and thus all quiet was made impossible and prayer liable to be disturbed by secular invasion, Jesus was stirred to make the most violent protest possible.

2. This action of Jesus has something to say to us on the subject of worship.

(1) There ought to be nothing to disturb reverence. The church is a place where people come to pray, and nothing should take place there which would hinder that purpose. It is this which should dictate our behaviour in church. If people cannot pray there undisturbed and without its seeming at all curious, we are doing them a very grievous wrong. It is this, and not slavish or superstitious ideas of God's worship, which should determine our reverence. It is for this reason that we should refrain from talking and obtrusive behaviour. If the externals of worship mean nothing to God, they mean a great deal to our fellow-men.

¶ Some may remember the story of Whiston, an old divine of the days of George II., whose memory has been preserved for us by Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*. He was a favourite with Queen Caroline, and on one occasion she asked him to tell her some fault in herself which she might endeavour to correct. 'Madam,' he replied, 'since you ask me this question I will tell you. When you come into the Chapel Royal and the voluntary is being played I see you and your ladies whispering and smiling and making signs to one another in a way which sets a very bad example to the rest of the congregation.' The Queen, we are told, accepted the reproof, recognizing the lack of reverence in her attitude.[1]

Everything that can create the sense of God's nearness and reality should be encouraged in the house of prayer. It should be made so that people *can* pray in it; it should *look* like a house of prayer; and every means should be taken to encourage people to pray there. For spiritual experiences leave their mark upon material surroundings and make it easy for others to feel God near.

¶ In 1917 Dr Fort Newton writes in his Diary: How beautiful is the spirit of reverence which pervades an English church service, in contrast with the too free and informal air of our American worship. The sense of awe, of quiet, of yearning prayer, so wistfully poignant in these days, makes an atmosphere most favourable to inspiration and insight. It makes preaching a different thing. In intellectual average and moral passion there is little difference between English and American preaching, but the emphasis is different. The Englishman goes to church, as to a house of ancient mystery, to forget the turmoil of the world, to be refreshed in spirit, to regain the great backgrounds of life, against which to see the problems of the morrow.[2]

O holy God, I ask this boon of Thee:—
Be mine, in truth, a soul that worships; free
From all profane and trivial thoughts, and filled
With reverential faith; a soul all stilled
In hush of awe; since Thou, the God most high,
To lowly, contrite men, art ever nigh.[3]

(2) Everything should make the House of God welcome to the stranger. It was not for the habitual worshippers, not for those who had entrance into the Holy Place, that Jesus was concerned, but for those who were admitted only on a lower plane and who would feel the more easily any sign that they were not welcome.

The application demanded is that strangers within our gates ought to be made specially welcome, that those who are not in the habit of coming to church ought to be made to feel

[1] E. Wordsworth, *Onward Steps*, 137.
[2] *Preaching in London*, 51.
[3] Carey Bonner.

quite at home. It is difficult to know always how to do this. What attracts one person to a church would determine some never to go again. When a man goes to church because he is inquiring what Christianity means, or surreptitiously feeling his way back to God, often the last thing he desires is that he should be noticed or pounced upon. Perhaps the very best thing we can do for him is to let it be seen that we are there to worship God. It is a subtle impression to convey; but it can be done by those who are equally alive to the presence of God and of their neighbour.

Perhaps to-day those who correspond most closely to the Gentiles of our Lord's time are the poor and the working classes. And it may be that what operates in their case to make them feel that the House of God is no place for them is the appropriation of pews and the contrast their dress would make with the ordinary well-dressed worshipper.

¶ One of the prejudices of Nonconformists is in favour of pew rents and allocated sittings. My own strong feeling is that sittings should be allocated for the morning service, when children come with their parents; but that in the evening all seats should be free. My first battle at Whitefield's was with one who subsequently became, and continued to the time of his death, a staunch and generous ally. He held by the proprietary principle of pew-holding. Your pew was as much your private property as the house you rented. We had a very spirited correspondence. He announced that he had given orders for the removal of his cushions to the City Temple; and I congratulated him on the opportunity he would have of hearing a far better preacher than myself. At last I invited myself to lunch at his house, and he met me at the door with the question whether I had brought my pistols. 'You see,' he said, 'I am accustomed to have my own way.' 'Yes,' I suggested, 'and it will therefore be a pleasant novelty for you to try mine.' We were the best of friends from that time on.[1]

These are matters difficult to adjust; but they ought to prove not impossible to those of us who are determined that the outward arrangements of our church shall express our real convictions about God and man. And people would probably confer a true blessing upon some of their fellow-worshippers if they did not wear clothes in church which cast every one else's into the shade. These seem small matters, but it is small things which account for large defections from church attendance.[1]

[1] C. Silvester Horne, *Pulpit Platform and Parliament*, 28.

The Temple of Man

Luke xix. 46.—'My house is the house of prayer.'

In the life of Watts a touching story is told of a man who came to see Rossetti with the hope of interesting him in his pictures. Rossetti looked at them, and then hesitated as he tried to find some words which would express the truth without wounding the sensitiveness of the artist. It was not easy, for the sketches were somewhat commonplace, with no sign of promise about them. At last he told him what he thought as sympathetically as he was able. The old man then drew out another collection of pictures by a young student, saying, 'What is your opinion of these?' Rossetti, delighted to show his appreciation of good work, said with alacrity, 'These are excellent. They show signs that the student will one day distinguish himself.' The old man put them by, saying, 'I was that student.'

Nothing could well be sadder than such a life history. Excellent promise forty years ago, now failure! It is not that the hand had lost its cunning, but that the man had lost his character.

Something of this sorrow belongs to the words of our Lord, 'My house is the house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves.' When Moses fashioned the lines of the Tabernacle, which were preserved in the great building of Herod where our Lord taught and worked, he saw a wonderful promise of a great future. This rude beginning, reared in the lonely desert of Sinai, should one day be a meeting-place for all the nations. For here was to be the only centre of mankind, the only source of fellowship, the only power that could bind men together, 'lively oracles' that would tell them of the mind of their Common Father, and a revealed system of worship which would show them how they could respond to His thought for them. More than a thousand years passed away, and He who was greater than the Temple stood within its walls to see what fulfilment of the promise there was. He found that, though

[1] W. E. Orchard, *The True Patriotism*, 113.

the building was more magnificent than Moses had ever dreamed of, yet in reality the rude sketch of Moses was far more true than the elaborate design of Herod. Of wide fellowship there was no trace, of spiritual communion with God only a suggestion. And so the doom of persistent failure, or rather of obstinate perversion, was passed upon it. 'They shall not leave in thee one stone upon another.' Some fifty years' respite was allowed, and then the judgment descended, and now in the wailing-place of Jerusalem the Jews meet weekly to lament its terrible overthrow.

1. But grievous and disappointing as the overthrow of God's House was, and we cannot forget it was the occasion of Christ's tears, there is the possibility of ruin to a House more wonderful than that, with a longer history and a more remarkable destiny, and of this the Jewish Temple was but a symbol.

¶ 'There is but one Temple in the Universe,' writes the devout Novalis, 'and that is the Body of Man. Nothing is higher than that high form. We touch Heaven when we lay hands on a human body,'—and Carlyle, who quotes these words, adds this comment: 'This sounds like a mere flourish of rhetoric, but it is not. If well meditated it will turn out to be a scientific fact, the expression, in such words as can be had, of the actual truth of the thing.'

(1) In the *body*, as in the Jewish Temple, there are plain indications of high destiny. The devout Jew was deeply impressed with the mystery of the body. 'I will give thanks to Thee,' he was taught to say, 'for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are Thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well.' And we have learnt more than he even guessed at. This amazing and incredible story of man, of his advance from the 'same single, simple cell in which the dog, the elephant, the lion, and the ape began their widely different lives,' through many stages, till at last we reach a Shakespeare or a Milton, only emphasizes his wonderful promise of distinction. Instead of degradation, as was once thought, Evolution preaches the hope of a glory to come.

(2) If we pass from the body to the *mind*, the suggestion of man's high destiny is strengthened. We need not underrate the intelligence of animals and insects in order to mark that of man. Their ability to fashion beautiful dwellings for themselves, to protect themselves from danger, to care for their young, to recollect places and persons, even to compute when taught, constantly excites our wonder. But, so far as we know, they have no sense of time. To man alone belongs the unique power of transporting himself forwards or backwards at will. He not only goes back to his birthday, but beyond that to the birth of his city, and beyond that, again, to the timeless beginnings of the hills which surround it, and beyond that to that first birth of time when God made the heavens and the earth. And as he can travel back, so with equal facility he goes forward. He refuses to be kept within the small paddock of a lifetime, but looks on to that fair City the Builder and Maker of which is God. It is his special happiness to hold communion with the Eternal, and the joy of the fellowship he holds with his friends is grounded on the fact that he knows that Death cannot interrupt it. Is it not written, then, in the make-up of the mind, that man's real home is that Eternity where God abides, and that the secret of his intellectual expansion lies in the bosom of His Maker?

(3) So also in the realm of the *soul* or spirit. It is generally admitted that in the soul, with its conflicts and struggles, its hopes and despairs, its torturing self-consciousness and its bitter sense of sin, its laughter and tears, its sobriety and madness we have that which is likest God and most unlike the brute. It is true the animal suffers, and is thereby linked with us, but it knows nothing of tragedy. Its wrong-doing is forgotten with its punishment; such recollection as it has is free from guilt. But with man it is different. His greatest sorrows spring from his conscience, and therein lies the proof of his greatness. As Pascal says:[1] 'Man is great even in knowing himself to be miserable. A tree is no more sensible of misery than of felicity. It is true the knowing himself to be miserable increases man's misery; but then it is no less a demonstration of his greatness. Thus, his greatness is shown by his miseries as by his mercies. They are the miseries of a mighty statesman in disgrace, of a prince dispossessed and dethroned.' It is in conscience, the voice of the soul, that we shall find the clearest traces of man's likeness to God. For conscience, as Wordsworth tells us, must be

[1] *Pensées*, xxiii.

looked upon as God's most intimate Presence in the soul, and His most perfect Image in the world. It is here we find a unique authority that speaks clearly, 'Thou shalt' and 'Thou shalt not.' Here, in the innermost recesses of man's nature, in the Holy of Holies, as it were, there is a clear indication of the Divine purpose, that man should find his true life in communion with God.

Is it not written, then, in every line of man's nature, that he is intended for communion with God, and that only through this fellowship can he realize his destiny? It is also clear that all that we know, even of the best of men, is only a prophecy of something still greater to come. The skeleton is only a mockery unless it serve as a milestone in the march of mankind. Death is a denial of a Divine testimony, unless it is the birth of a larger and freer life. It is only in communion with One stronger than Death that the hopes written so freely in man's nature are likely to be realized.

2. What proof have we? asks the inquirer. The Christian's answer is clear and definite. In the human nature of One who lived some two thousand years ago the promise of a glorious future was remarkably plain. In Body, Mind and Spirit the witness was convincing, though it flashed forth out of much weakness. Often He was seen to be hungry, tired, thirsty, faint and weak; the Body seemed to deny the greatness of His unique personality. But on one occasion it seemed as though the prophecy written so large was about to be fulfilled. On the testimony of His three nearest disciples, the Body once underwent a marvellous change—He was transfigured before them. But even this great revelation has left less impression than the wonder of His Mind and Spirit. 'Whence is this wisdom?' was the common comment upon His wonderful teaching, unlike anything that the world had heard before. And the witness of His Mind was even less striking than that of His Spirit. The character of Christ, that is the real miracle. It is well to think of the amazing expansion of the human nature He took to Himself. The fact that it could so perfectly advance in growth, waxing stronger and stronger, becoming more and more full of wisdom, is a remarkable testimony to man's possibilities.

But it was soon cut short. Death of a particularly cruel and horrible nature closed a short life of barely thirty-three years, and it seemed as though the strongest testimony to man's worth that the world had seen would be buried in silence as all other like testimonies had been before. Then, unexpectedly, to the surprise of those who knew Him best, the answer to men's hopes and longings was given. He came back—returned as the Faithful Witness.

Is it creditable to the sanity of human judgment that man, who knows of the prophecy of his own nature, who knows also that he has but a few short years wherein to determine it, should yet order his life without any relation to it?[1]

¶ More wonderful than any world-famous temple is the temple of your soul and mind; for in us, through the discipline of temptations fought and conquered, of sorrows borne, of tasks faced, of all that makes life so solemn and yet so glorious, God intends to build—is building, I trust—a character destined to perfection in that larger world, but even now beginning to manifest some traits, at least, of His beauty. Look at the pattern of your life, and listen while old George Herbert[2] sings so quaintly:

Mark you the floor? that square and speckled stone,
Which looks so firm and strong,
Is *Patience*:

And th'other black and grave, wherewith each one
Is chequer'd all along,
Humility:

The gentle rising, which on either hand
Leads to the quire above,
Is *Confidence*:

But the sweet cement, which in one sure band
Ties the whole frame, is *Love*
And *Charity*.

Hither sometimes Sin steals, and stains
The marble's neat and curious veins:
But all is cleansed when the marble weeps.
Sometimes Death, puffing at the door,
Blows all the dust about the floor;
But while he thinks to spoil the room, he sweeps.
Blest be the *Architect*, whose art
Could build so strong in a weak heart.

[1] G. H. S. Walpole, *The Shrine and the Presence*, 1.
[2] *The Church Floor*.

He can build strong in hearts as weak as yours and mine. He can build temples of the living God.[1]

The Authority of Christ

Luke xx. 2.—'Tell us, by what authority doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority?'

1. Sooner or later every man who stands out before his fellow-men as a teacher or a reformer must find an answer to this question. Just in proportion to the novelty or gravity of his teaching, and the extent or severity of his proposed reforms, will this question be pressed on him by those whom he addresses. Every moral or religious teaching has its bearing on conduct, and every reform imperils or plainly injures some vested interest. Accordingly, the teacher and the reformer find themselves confronted with opponents. It is not only the selfish people, who dread some material loss if the new teaching is accepted or the new reforms carried into effect, whom the teacher and the reformer must reckon with. The best people, whose consciences are most sensitive and whose loyalty to an established system is most intense, will want to be satisfied that the changes to which they are summoned are really demanded by some authority to which they ought to yield obedience: and that authority must be able to command the assent of their consciences.

Jesus Christ, both as teacher and as reformer, challenged the severest investigation into His authority. For His teaching appeared to be revolutionary, and the reforms to which He called men were plainly hostile to powerful vested interests. Yet the current doctrine claimed to be divine, and the endangered interests were those of a divinely ordained hierarchy. He had just taken up an attitude so authoritative that His personal claim must needs be brought into public discussion. The cleansing of the Temple had brought things to a head. There was a hurried meeting of the Sanhedrin that night in order that the perplexed authorities might take counsel together and determine on a course of action. On the day following, as Jesus was teaching the people in the Temple, a formal deputation from the Sanhedrin, composed of 'chief priests, scribes, and elders,' approached Him, and put to Him the crucial and categorical demand: 'Tell us, by what authority doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority?'

This question would strike the people as quite reasonable, and indeed was reasonable in itself. The Sanhedrin, as the supreme ecclesiastical authority among the Jews, was responsible for the character of those who passed as teachers of religion. If Jesus claimed to be a 'prophet,' He could not refuse to submit His credentials to their investigation. If He claimed a higher character then there would be trouble ahead, not only from the authorities of the Jewish State but also from those of the Roman State. How could the Sanhedrin acquiesce in so dangerous a situation? Were the Romans likely to permit an agitation, which was clearly taking a treasonable shape, to gather strength unhindered? Thus the way was opening for that collusion of Jewish Church and Roman State which finally effected the crucifixion of Jesus. Apart, however, from any cynical calculations, such as those which visited the mind of Caiaphas, there would be a legitimate anxiety that the question of authority should be satisfactorily answered. According to Edersheim, 'there was no principle more firmly established by universal consent than that authoritative teaching required previous authorization. It is certain that at the time of our Lord no one would have ventured authoritatively to teach without proper Rabbinic authorization.' So, when the imposing deputation of hierarchs propounded their question, we may be sure that the general sentiment of Christ's audience, and even of His disciples, would have allowed both its justice and its importance, and that all would have awaited with eagerness the reply which it would receive.

2. Now, it is observable that Christ's method of answering questions, which bore directly on His Divine claim, was at once straightforward, and impersonal. He does not return a simple 'Yes' or 'No': but He does not flinch from the real point. Thus when the Baptist sent from prison the inquiry, 'Art Thou he that cometh, or look we for another?' Christ did not simply answer, 'Yes, I am;' He made the Baptist find his own answer from the facts to which He directed him.

So also here. In neither case is there any

[1] F. T. Woods, *Great Tasks*, 103.

shelving of the inquiry, still less any adroit avoidance of it, but in both there is an answer which, though clear, is yet indirect, and forces His questioners to judge themselves in the process of finding it. 'He answered and said unto them, I also will ask you a question, and tell me: the baptism of John, was it from heaven or from men?' That is equivalent to saying: 'John did clearly bear witness to Me as the Messiah: do you believe his witness to be inspired from above? If so, you have your answer. I am Messiah, and the authority which I exercise is Messianic. If you do not believe what John said respecting Me, then you must explain your view of John's ministry.' This answer by questioning throws the Lord's enemies into the utmost confusion. 'They reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven, he will say, Why did ye not believe him? But if we shall say, From men; all the people will stone us: for they be persuaded that John was a prophet.' In their base and cowardly minds the whole question was one of expediency, though truly it carried the fate of Israel. They had not asked sincerely what Christ's authority could be: their question was nothing more than a 'move' in the complicated 'game' of selfish policy. 'And they answered, that they knew not whence it was. And Jesus said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.'

3. The question of the Sanhedrin is being asked now from within the Church. 'What kind of authority'—for that is the proper meaning of the Greek—does Christ exercise? Is it inherent in His person? or is it acquired in the course of time? Was the 'historic Jesus' really 'God incarnate'? or has He only come to be clothed with Divine attributes in succeeding times? Is His authority moral, or ecclesiastical? Does it find expression in fixed institutions, or in persistent ideals? Is it perpetual, and unlimited, or is it time-born and time-bound? Has He His witness within the human spirit? or does He speak through some august representative other than the man himself? Are the credentials of His authority in the past, or in the present, historical or spiritual, capable of formulation in an irresistible case, or limited in their relevance to sympathetic and receptive individuals? Such are some of the shapes which the question receives when we begin to reflect on it at the present time.

It is instructive to compare the answers which were severally returned by the Baptist and the Apostles, when they were challenged to state their authority. When the deputation of 'priests and Levites' came from Jerusalem to inquire of the Baptist who he claimed to be, they were met by an earnest repudiation of any greater character than that of another's dependent. He assured them that he was 'not the Christ, neither Elijah, neither the Prophet': and, when they insisted that his ministry implied some authoritative rôle, he replied: 'I baptize with water: in the midst of you standeth One whom ye know not, even He that cometh after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose.' Whatever else his ministry might mean, it did not mean anything extraordinary in himself. Its whole significance stood in reference to another.

Similarly, when, after the Resurrection, the Apostles Peter and John healed the lame man who lay begging at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, they were challenged by the Sanhedrin to confess publicly what was the power by which, and the Name in which, they had acted. Their reply is thus given by the sacred historian: 'Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even in him doth this man stand here before you whole.' Here again is the same phenomenon. The Apostles, like the Baptist, repudiate any inherent power, and refer themselves wholly to Another, with reference to whom their ministry had meaning and virtue. Christ is unique in accepting the suggestion of inherent personal authority. He declines, indeed, to utter His claim, but only because it had already been uttered by the Baptist, and was fully understood by the Sanhedrin. The decisive hour was drawing near, when He would declare His character with His own lips, and in the most explicit language. Thus the record of the Passion relates the self-assertion of the Christ: 'The high priest asked him, and saith unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.'

'Tell us: By what kind of authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this

authority ? ' There is a suggestion of terrible malignity in the words. The questioners knew that Jesus had received no Rabbinic ordination, and that He disclaimed the prophetic character. Whence then could He draw His commission to teach, and exorcise, to revise the established system, and cleanse the Temple ? The thought is in their minds, which at an earlier stage they had actually uttered, that ' By Beelzebub, the prince of devils, casteth he out devils.' But this suggestion itself implies a notable admission. They perforce acknowledge that there is something in the action of Christ which cannot be explained on ordinary assumptions. This admission is profoundly significant. It is indeed bent to the service of a truly wonderful malice, but it may more fitly and more easily inspire the confession of faith, as in the case of that man ' blind from his birth,' upon whom Christ is said to have conferred the boon of sight, and who argued simply and shortly, ' If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.'

Yes ! write it on the rock, St Bernard said,
Grave it on brass with adamantine pen :
'Tis God Himself becomes apparent when
God's wisdom and God's goodness are displayed,
For God of these His attributes is made.

4. The ' problem of Jesus '—if we may adopt a modern phrase—emerges in the question of the Sanhedrin. Here in the New Testament is the portrait of a unique person, and the story of a unique life. Here in Christian history is the record of a personal influence, unique in its quality, permanence and power—not one of us.

¶ I stood, one morning, by the shore of an island in the Orkney group. It was a shore of white sand and shells and pebbles. Over these one trod carelessly, for at every step it was the same. But suddenly I stood still, for my eye had fallen upon a shell which, lying amongst the others, was yet a stranger to all its fellows. There it lay, with a tone, a colour, which separated it from the surrounding greyness. I stooped to gaze and peer at its unwonted texture and grain, and these only increased the sense which had come to me with the wonder of its colouring, that it was a stranger to those cold and formidable shores. And as I mused, the fire burned. I remembered that I was standing on a shore which from all time has been washed by a generous flood. The Gulf Stream passes that way, and once in passing it had cast the shell upon that dreary waste of rock and sand. The Gulf Stream had borne it from afar, and cast it where it lay—to make one man here and there stand still on the journey of his life, and consider it, and dream of its homeland under a clearer sun beyond the seas. Just so did the outgoing heart of God, that Eternal tide of love, bear Him to us, casting Him upon this bank and shoal of time, to break the weary tyranny of things, the curse of fate and custom and iron law ; to urge one here and there to pause upon his way and consider, and in one brave ejaculation make the great and blessed Inference of Faith.[1]

How shall the uniqueness of Jesus be explained and formulated ? ' What think ye of the Christ, whose son is he ? ' We hear men discussing the miracles of the New Testament, but in truth there is only one miracle—Jesus. There is only one miracle that matters to the Christian, and that is the miracle of Jesus, a miracle which, like the fabled rock in the wilderness, accompanies the Church through history, and renews the wonder of the Gospel in every believer's experience.

Christ's Silence as to His Authority

Luke xx. 2, 3.—' Tell us, by what authority doest thou these things ? or who is he that gave thee this authority ? And he answered and said unto them, I will also ask you one thing.'

1. We must not think that Jesus took this way of answering His questioners simply because He felt Himself in a difficulty. It was not just in order to get time, or possibly to avoid the question altogether, that Jesus, instead of answering them directly and in a word, replied by putting a question in turn. It was not that this inquiry as to the Source of His authority had placed Him in an awkward position, and that in order to relieve Himself He had recourse to a stratagem. We reject such an explanation on the bare mention of it. It would confuse our image of our Saviour were we to suppose that on even one occasion He was merely clever, shrewd, adroit—so profoundly has His uniqueness impressed itself upon us all. And so we reject as out of harmony with the soul of Jesus the explanation that when the question of the chief priests and the elders had placed Him in a difficulty, He relieved Himself by putting

[1] J. A. Hutton, *The Authority and Person of our Lord*, 66.

a question which placed them in as great a difficulty.

And this explanation, which we reject on grounds of sentiment, we reject also on grounds of reason and actual fact. For it was not in the power of any man to place Jesus in a difficulty —in our ordinary sense of that word. When we speak of a man being in a difficulty, we mean, ultimately, that he is afraid of the *world*, afraid that if he acts in a particular way he will suffer somehow at the hands of the world. But such a way of looking at things had really no influence upon Jesus. He had no fear of the world. In His own lonely imagination He had faced the last hostility of man. And again, we know that in other circumstances Jesus did not hesitate to confess that it was from God, His Father, He received His power. We read elsewhere (John v. 18) that the Jews sought to kill Him because He said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.

2. We know how Jesus turned them off. Not because He was afraid, or because He was unwilling to answer. We know that He had answered their question every day of His life, when any seeking soul sought His help. But He now refused to give an answer to their specious question because He discerned the spirit of their heart.

But this is a mistake. He *did* answer them, for He generously gave them a blessed opportunity of answering themselves—which is the only way in which this type of question can ever be answered by any one. In giving His reply, He took the great and noble instance of John the Baptist, that incomparable prophet of God. Everybody knew the work of John, and everybody had been given a full opportunity of judging him. This was an argument from the less to the greater. If they could answer their own question in regard to John, how much more clearly could they answer it in regard to Him?

This counter-question of Jesus is not an evasion, but is the necessary preliminary to any serious answer of their own question. For Christ's question is the plainest test of their sincerity and genuineness. If they were genuine people, they would have no difficulty in answering Him regarding John. The deputation drew off to a corner of the courtyard and whispered solemnly and secretly together. 'If we say "of men," our lives will be in danger, for the people revere the sacred name of the Baptist and count him a prophet of God. No, we dare not say "of men." . . . If we say "of God," we shall be playing into His hands. We and not He will be in a cleft stick: for He will turn at once and say, "Why, then, did ye not believe Him?"' At last, when they had debated the matter to their own satisfaction, they came forward and said: 'Master, we cannot tell.' Christ looked at them, seeing deep down into their hypocritical souls. We cannot imagine any more austere and withering answer than His: 'Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things.'

These men were dishonest, with themselves and with God, and Christ does not answer, then or now, people of that sort. We know how readily and graciously He deals with all honest inquirers. When a member of this party, a Scribe, came asking one of the petty dialectic questions of the day—in his case asking it honestly—Jesus answered him as honestly as he asked it. 'Which is the greatest commandment, Lord?' and when Christ answered him, the man marvelled. There was no needy seeker whom Jesus did not treat with infinite courtesy. But there are types of people and types of questions, insincere or sneering, with which He will have nothing to do.

3. Let us see how perfectly and fully Christ answered the question of these priests. For His notable reply states some broad principles, that mean everything for us.

(1) In the first place, no good man ever needs outside authority to permit him to do good. The only authority is that of his own conscience and his own Master. Righteousness lies in the nature of things, and its own 'rightness' is its only guarantee. If a thing is good, it is already established eternally as the only thing that has a right to be! A good man holds his charter from no man, and need answer to no man. He holds his charter from no church, and need answer to no church. He holds his charter direct from God and from God alone.

It would be a queer world if we had to give reasons for doing good or were forced to quote authorities for being virtuous. For the authorities would be less than that which they were supposed to authorize! You can never authorize goodness by saying that it is ex-

pedient or fitting or proper: you can only authorize it by saying that it is *good*! Its only authority lies in itself, in the nature of what it is.

(2) Christ's answer states a second principle. The priests asked Him for a special sign of authority, something out of the common, by which they might be convinced. But they had all the ordinary authority before them that a reasonable soul can either expect or possess. They had the authority of His works, His life, His words, which in common with everybody else they might have judged with an open mind. But that did not satisfy them. They wanted some startling signal sign of His claim to be what He was and do what He did.

Jesus had settled this temptation for Himself in the desert. He resolved to win or lose men by ordinary ways of reason and appeal. He might have used the extraordinary: but He put that aside as unworthy of Him and God. He resolved to appeal only to the mind and heart and soul of men—their reasonable nature.

In this instance, the Pharisees are practically asking Him for a little private miracle to substantiate His claims. But this is beyond the self-imposed scope of Christ's work. He will preach God and God's truth: He will appeal to the human soul: but beyond that, He will not go. If men do not choose Him for the worth of His message, for its essential appeal to the human soul, He can do nothing more.

¶ Says Pascal: 'It is the intention of God to be visible to those who seek Him with all their hearts, and concealed from those who are disposed to shun Him. There is light enough for those who are disposed to see, and darkness enough for those who are disinclined. There is illumination sufficient for the sincere ones, and obscurity sufficient to prevent the wicked or the careless from seeing at all, yet there is illumination sufficient to condemn them and to render them inexcusable.'

(3) There is a third principle. The religion of Jesus is a faith. In saying this, we do not contrast faith with knowledge. The genius of the Christian faith is that it looks forward one day to perfect knowledge. But we contrast faith with *authority*—that ancient, and very modern, passion to have some outside guarantee on which we can lean. So many of us do not trust in Jesus for Himself, but we trust in what lesser authorities say about Him. We trust, for instance, in an infallible book, or an infallible church, or in some infallible expert. It is pathetic to see how so many modern folk ask for some authority on which they are going to rest their views of Jesus.

We take everything to-day—our thinking, our ideas, our education, our statecraft, even our religion—from the hands of specialized authorities. It is sheer mental ruin, especially in religion. 'What think ye of Jesus?'—and you for yourself are as able to settle your personal relation to Him as any scholar that was ever born. Jesus believed that the simplest soul could accept Him fully as Lord and Master, and could do it—nay, must do it—out of his own heart and mind. Jesus is His own and only authority.

¶ Herrmann of Marburg used to say, 'we cannot prove the Divinity of Jesus to the unbeliever'—that is to say, to the man who refuses to commit himself to Him and put His claims to the test. This truth has received vivid and picturesque expression at the hands of Nathaniel Hawthorne: 'The friends left the church, and looking up, from the exterior, at the window which they had just been contemplating from within, nothing was visible but the merest outline of dusky shapes. Neither the individual likeness of saint, angel, nor Saviour, and far less the combined scheme and purport of the picture, could any wise be made out. That miracle of radiant art, thus viewed, was nothing better than an incomprehensible obscurity, without a gleam of beauty to induce the beholder to attempt unravelling it.

"All this," thought the sculptor, "is a most forcible emblem of the different aspect of religious truth and sacred story, as viewed from the warm interior of belief, or from its cold and dreary outside. Christian faith is a grand cathedral with divinely pictured windows. Standing without, you see no glory, nor can possibly imagine any; standing within, every ray of light reveals a harmony of unspeakable splendours."'[1]

Only from within can we truly know.

By what authority, then, doest thou these things? God's or man's? Jesus gave the priests the only answer that is ever possible—'Be ye the judges!' It is always and only a matter for your own soul.

[1] *The Marble Faun*, xxxiii.

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